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Nick o' the Night; OR, THE BOY SPY OF '76.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAPTURED DISPATCHES.

At a late hour one night in the month of April, 1781, three figures appeared suddenly, like specters, on the summit of an eminence that overlooked one of the fords of the beautiful Edisto in South Carolina.

They consisted of a horse, his rider, and a dog.

Behind them rose the pale, placid moon, across whose disk dark and ragged clouds were gliding. Below, the glittering waters of Carolina's legendary river flow'd oceanward with musical murmurs, and nigh^g songster, perched among the branches of a

palmetto that grew at the river's edge, charmed the hour with his notes.

When the horse suddenly pricked up his ears at a sound that did not rouse his master, the dog looked up as if to say, "I, too, hear it," and then getting on his feet, for he had laid down for a rest, he looked sharply across the stream.

"What is it, Whig?" the rider asked, noticing the actions of the dog. "Are the hirelings of King George abroad to-night? It is said that their couriers fit between Dorchester and Orangeburg like ghosts. Ah! could we but catch one to-night!" and a light laugh rippled over the speaker's lips.

He was young, as his tone indicated. It was not hard, like a man's, but soft and melodious as a girl's. His face was faultless in contour, and remarkably handsome. The eyes, large and lustrous, were full of depth and expression, and the wreath of dark hair that adorned his head, touched his shoulders, broad and strong, *a la* cavalier. A light hat, with a broad rim, covered his head, and his clothes, homemade and serviceable, fitted his person without a fault.

His arms consisted of pistols, cavalry sword, and a light, short-handled rifle.

The horse was the type of animal symmetry and beauty, and the keen-eyed dog the picture of canine strength and endurance.

The latter led his young master to look beyond the ford, and to listen intently.

Presently the sounds that had attracted the animal's attention fell also upon his ears.

"Somebody's out, certain," he said, as if addressing his companions. "We will watch the ford."

The sounds, made evidently by hoofs, continued to approach the river from the opposite bank, and at length the moon, peeping over the edge of a cloud, showed a solitary horseman at the edge of the water.

"A courier to Dorchester!" said the boy, with delight. "We'll see what he carries to the king's officer who commands there."

The next instant the summit of the hill was bare and the so-called courier was in the middle of the ford, proceeding across with a *nonchalance* that did not stamp him a watchful messenger.



"YOU ARE MINE, JOTHAM!" SAID THE YOUNG PARTISAN, DARTING A LOOK OF TRIUMPH INTO THE FACE OF HIS FOE.

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If the youth's horse made any noise in descending the hill, the courier heard it not, for his own steed was plashing through the water, and he was not thinking about the presence of an enemy.

Once across the stream, the night rider halted for a moment as if to take his bearings, then proceeded straight forward in a tolerably well-defined road.

"So far, so good," he said to himself, in a congratulating strain. "Few couriers ride so far without meeting Nick o' the Night. I'd like to encounter that devil-may-care boy, whose exploits have made him famous, and who is the terror of our troops. I'm on his old stamping-ground now, and this is a good hour for him to make his appearance. Yes, Jotham Nettleton, of the king's army, would like to meet him."

The speaker, who was riding slowly forward, held a pistol tightly clutched in his right hand, for he was in a lonely part of the Edisto country, and the moon was hidden by a cloud.

The time, the place and the hour, suggested ghosts to the superstitious trooper.

All at once, as the orb of night, as if obeying a preconcerted signal, showered her light on the road, a stern command broke the stillness:

"Halt!"

The British dragoon started at the voice, and his steed, frightened as badly as his master, retreated without command.

In the center of the road appeared the cause for the sudden change of scene.

There stood a magnificent horse, and the trooper saw the rider with rifle leveled at his breast!

Near the steed's front feet crouched a dog, ready, as it seemed, for a panther-like spring.

The Briton took in the figures at a single look, while the spell of fright was still upon him.

"Deliver up your papers!" said the same voice that commanded him to stand.

"My papers?" said the dragoon. "What do you suppose I am?"

"A courier to Dorchester!" was the reply, "and I, sir, am Nick o' the Night—the very fellow you have been longing to meet. You have met me now, and, sir, your obliging disposition, and that alone, will be the only thing that will take you on to Dorchester. Come, your papers—the dispatches!"

The trooper cast a longing look at the eastern heavens.

"Darkness will not assist you," said the young partisan with triumph, "as the moon will shine for five minutes, at the end of which time I will have the dispatches, be you dead or alive! Bring them forth!"

Jotham Nettleton, of the King's Horse, bit his lip, and thrust his left hand into his bosom.

"Shall I throw them to you?" he asked, drawing forth the precious packet.

"No; cast them on the ground."

The trooper obeyed with an oath.

"Get it, Whig!"

The crouching dog sprung forward, seized the packet with his shining teeth, and walked toward his master.

"Thank you," the youth said to the trooper, in a sarcastic tone. "I trust that our acquaintance will prove mutually agreeable. You may tell the commanding at Dorchester, that Nick o' the Night will place the dispatches in the Swamp Fox's hands. I do not want you, dragoon—what's your name?"

"Jotham Nettleton, curse your supreme impudence!" cried the trooper, irritated beyond endurance.

"Mr. Nick o' the Night, we have not met for the last time! I'm going to turn hunting now, and I swear by you fair moon that I will rid this State of your brigandish presence. You dare not carry on warfare in a Christian manner, but you must stop folks at night, and lead Marion's infernal vagabonds upon sleeping camps and unprotected settlements. The day of your triumph is drawing to a close, for the villainous deed which you have just done has placed an inveterate foe on your track—Jotham Nettleton, of the Royal Horse, sir!"

"May you prove a foe worthy of my steel!" said the youth, after a short laugh that made the trooper grind his teeth with rage.

"But I must be off. Go on to Dorchester, Jotham Nettleton. I'll stand aside, and, like a gentleman, give you the path."

Thereupon the speaker drove into the edge of the road, and signed for the robbed dragoon to pass on.

Slowly Nettleton rode by.

He kept his eyes fixed on Nick o' the Night, until he had passed his shadow.

"We'll meet again!" he hissed over his left shoulder. "By all that is good, young bandit, I'll hunt you to the death!"

A laugh from the youth was the response, and Nettleton turned in his saddle and shook his fist at the plunderer, until the moon was eclipsed by a cloud.

"I'll do it!" reiterated the dragoon. "I don't permit boys to rob me with impunity. By the crown of King George! he shall rue the hour in which he stopped Jotham Nettleton, and robbed him of his dispatches!"

As the dragoon disappeared, the boy bent over and took the packet which the dog held up to him in his teeth.

Then he turned his horse's head and rode down the river-bank.

After riding in a southerly direction for some time, he wheeled to the left and urged his horse down a well-defined road at a rapid gait.

By and by he reached the vicinity of a plantation, and soon rode up an avenue of oaks toward one of the colonial mansions that have been the pride of the Carolinas.

This avenue was quite gloomy, but a light that glittered far ahead guided the young partisan, and he at length dismounted before the residence.

It was twelve o'clock, but his knock was responded to with promptness, and he recognized the man who opened the door, for he said "Good-night, colonel," and was admitted.

The horse and his canine companion remained in the court.

The man led the youth into a spacious and high-ceiled library, lighted by a rich English lamp.

There were several family portraits on the walls, and the resemblance that the man bore to them was remarkable.

"Well, Nicholas," said the man, turning upon the boy, in the mellow light of the lamp. "What is up that you visit me at this hour?"

"I bring you a little packet that a British soldier gave me to-night," was the reply, and there was a merry twinkle in the speaker's dark eyes.

"Give me, Nicholas."

"Yes, at my command, and with my rifle at his breast! Sir, will you not see what it contains?"

The man took the captured packet and hastily broke the seal.

Nick o' the Night watched his hands, and then his expression, as he read a paper which they unfolded.

"You intercepted an order that concerns you, Nicholas," the Carolinian said, with a smile. "Can you read?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy, approaching the desk, at which the man had seated himself. "Mother taught me to read before she died."

Then the unfolded paper was placed in his hand, and he read what appeared to be the postscript to the main body of the captured packet:

"Lord Rawdon desires the capture or death of that troublesome youth called Nick o' the Night, who infests the territory watered by the Edisto, Ashley and Cooper rivers. He has frustrated many of our plans by his cunning and daring, and his lordship commands you to hunt him down. Marion would not be so formidable without him, and Sumter would remain ignorant of our plans. Attend to Lord Rawdon's wishes, and by fair means or foul, rid the district of its infernal pest!"

Appended to this communication were the initials of the British officer in command at Orangeburg. The paragraph was but a postscript to one of the lengthy dispatches in the body of the packet.

"They don't like Nick o' the Night," the young partisan said, as, with a smile on his lips, he looked up into the man's face. "By fair means or by foul, I am to be dealt with now, and I want to tell you, Colonel Hayne, that I am not afraid of the whole British army in South Carolina!"

The boy's eyes flashed like sparks of fire as the last sentence fell from his lips, and with the final word he brought his clenched hands down with emphasis on the desk.

Colonel Hayne, the devoted patriot, gazed with pride upon him.

"Beware! Nicholas," he said, in his careful voice. "Do nothing rash, now that you are outlawed by the generals of King George. Be firm, be cautious—a lion and a fox!"

"I will!" cried the boy; "this letter does not daunt me. The sword that I have drawn for freedom shall not be sheathed by the command of a merciless foe. Let them hunt me; let them set a price upon my head! I can ride where no British trooper dare follow; my hiding-places are legion, and so long as I am Nick o' the Night, I will fling scorn and defiance at the royal cause!"

CHAPTER II.

SECRETS OVERHEARD.

"You cannot hate the king's cause more bitterly than I do," said Colonel Hayne, after a pause. "The enemies of American freedom are my enemies, her defenders my dearest friends. But I am on parole, and until certain, unforeseen events occur, I cannot take up arms against the king."

Nick o' the Night gave the patriot an inquisitive look.

"Those events I may not mention now," Hayne continued, answering the look, and then suddenly asked:

"Nicholas, whither are you going before dawn?"

"I hope to see the Swamp Fox before daylight," was the reply.

"Francis Marion! God bless the little Huguenot," exclaimed Hayne. "With such men as he our cause would never languish. A hundred times has he proved himself a destroying thunderbolt to the royal foe, and his sword will not find its sheath till we are free."

"True as gospel, colonel," cried Nick o' the Night, with eyes brimful of patriotic enthusiasm. "Old South Carolina shall be proud of her sons who fought King George. When the war is over, we will sit under the starry flag and talk of our victories."

The smile that wreathed Colonel Hayne's lips was quickly driven off by a thoughtful expression.

When the war was over!

Alas! he might never see that day, for England in the end might triumph.

Already the shadow of a gallows was stretching toward his path. The day of his doom was not far distant.

"That glorious day is coming, colonel," exclaimed the little partisan, "and may we live to hail it with cheers of exultation. But I must ride away. Those dispatches, not very important, but the fruits of a little victory, must be placed in Marion's hands. I shall find him in his canebrake camp, near the banks of the Ashley."

"Bear to him the best respects of Isaac Hayne," said the patriot, taking the boy's hand. "Greene has re-entered the State, and I look for better times

than we have had. Be on your guard, Nicholas; do not forget that Rawdon has outlawed you. The purpose of the courier's message will reach Dorchester in the course of time; then they will try to run you to earth."

"Let them try it!" the youth said, defiantly, and released by the Carolinian, he walked to the cut.

A minute later he was in the saddle and the black horse was galloping down the avenue of oaks.

Close at his heels followed Whig, the dog.

Out from the avenue, into the road revealed by the setting moon, then across the country, rode Nick o' the Night.

Starlight presently ruled the heavens, and a brisk southern breeze elevated the rim of the boy's palmetto, and toyed wantonly with the long locks of raven hair that fell over his shoulders.

The ground over which he rode was pliant, and his steed's hoofs made no noise.

"Here I am!" he suddenly exclaimed, as a great dark mass of trees rose before him. "Helen, I trust that your dreams are sweet, and peaceful. I would not dissipate them for the world. It makes my blood flow backward to think that he who calls himself your father would make you love the king's cause; that he, not you, will choose your husband. He your father? No! Helen Latimer, he is no more your father than he is mine, and I know that mine fell before Tarleton's merciless sword at the Waxhaws."

Talking thus, in an indignant strain, the young partisan rode into a dark place, an avenue well-bordered by the magnolia, and this avenue led to a southern home where wealth and comfort dwelt.

Hugh Latimer, the owner and tenant, was a stern man of fifty years, whose sympathies were with the royal cause. No devout loyalist lived in the South, and he had received many favors from Cornwallis and Rawdon, the former of whom had passed several weeks at Azalea, as the estate was called.

The loyalist's household consisted of two beautiful girls whom he called his daughters.

Blonde and brunette, their tastes were almost antagonistic; the elder, Bertha, the "dark-eyed" of Azalea, as she was called, was in her nineteenth year, while over her sister's golden hair had passed but sixteen summers.

Hugh Latimer was proud—proud of his ancestry, proud of his children.

His word was law at Azalea, and the servants knew better than to disregard his most foolish whim.

But more of this family anon.

It was toward Hugh Latimer's home that the young partisan rode.

He could see the trees that bordered the avenue but indistinctly. They looked like ghosts with their contorted branches; but the fragrance of their blossoms was deliciously sweet.

Not many yards from the entrance of the avenue Nick o' the Night drew to one side of the path, and moved his hand along the body of a venerable tree.

He appeared to be searching for something—something that seemed to elude his hand; but at last a low ejaculation of triumph parted his lips.

His hand suddenly disappeared in a hole, unseen in the gloom.

A moment later it was withdrawn, and the paper clutched by the fingers was quickly thrust beneath the partisan's coat.

The strange post-office had yielded a letter.

"Heaven bless you, Helen!" said Nicholas, as his hand, emerging from the hidden pocket, moved toward the tree with a letter in its grasp.

But he did not deposit the message.

The sound of voices fell suddenly on his ears, and he became aware of approaching horsemen.

"Silence, Santee, and you, Whig, lie down!" he spoke to his companions, and thrusting the message back into the pocket, he quietly drew a pistol.

The sounds grew more distinct, and presently the words became intelligible.

"Holly will be here to-morrow night you say, Latimer?"

"Yes."

"In force?"

"Not very strong; twenty-five or thirty men will accompany him; but that will be sufficient."

"Is Azalea sufficiently large to quarter them?"

Hugh Latimer laughed.

"Why I could quarter a company of dragoons at Azalea," was the reply. "In the secret compartments of the old house, three-score men can hide, and lynx-eyed enemies might search for them in vain. Wait till you have seen the mansion, captain."

"I am impatient, Latimer. We will not find your daughters up, I suppose?"

"Helen might be awake."

"Awaiting your return?"

"No."

A moment's pause followed Latimer's monosyllabic reply.

"The girl thinks she is in love," continued the wealthy loyalist in a sneering tone. "Stop, captain, I want to tell you something."

The next moment the twain halted in the avenue, directly in front of the young partisan, who heard distinctly every word of the foregoing conversation.

They were so near that he could have touched them with his outstretched sword.

"Your youngest daughter in love?" said Latimer's companion, after the halt.

"So she thinks," was the reply. "Listen, Captain Clayton. One year ago, come the twenty-sixth day of this month, Helen was crossing the Ashley, which had been swollen by recent rains. She was in the old ford which was swifter and deeper than usual, and her horse, a colt which I had forbidden her to mount, became frightened by a musket shot on the northern bank. He started forward with a lunge that unseat-

ed the girl, and she found herself in the water. I suppose she would have been drowned, but for the timely, but accursed aid that was at hand."

"The accursed aid you say, Latimer?"

"Yes!" hissed the loyalist; "a certain person who saw her danger dashed from the copse, plunged into the river and drew her out."

"It was a good act, at any rate!" said Latimer's friend.

"You will not praise the actor when I shall have told you his name," said the Tory, with a light but bitter laugh.

"Then out with it. If you curse him, I will curse him, too."

"They call him Nick o' the Night!"

A singular silence followed.

It made the boy smile, and he fancied that he saw a look of consternation on the captain's face.

"Yes, I will curse the pest of this State!" said Latimer's companion, at last. "He must be hunted down, and here is one who would give his right hand for a blow at the miscreant's head with his British sword. Your daughter loves him, then?"

"Yes. She is a rebel at heart, and an active one, too. I am ashamed to say, captain, that there is treason in my household. Helen keeps up a correspondence with that dare-devil boy, and more than once I have seen a light in her window at twelve o'clock at night—a signal of some kind to him. More than this," continued the Tory, "I have discovered their post-office!"

"Ah! then you will doubtless intercept some tender missive."

"Believe me that I will," answered Latimer.

"Give me your hand, captain, and turn your horse's head to the left—toward the dark trees beside us."

Nick o' the Night saw, but indistinctly, the twain turn toward him.

The next moment Hugh Latimer was moving his hand over the tree, in search of the novel "post-office."

"I've found it, but it is letterless," he suddenly cried. "Lift your hand, captain. I will guide it. There! your fingers are on the edge of their letter-box. Isn't this a pretty go?"

"Truly," answered the captain. "I never would have thought of looking there for a letter."

"Nor I, but one of my slaves found the spot. More than once I have suspected that Helen sent and received letters from some secret place, but never dreamed that it was so near my house. But we'll catch the young scoundrel now. Some night when he comes hither for a letter, he'll run into a trap from which he cannot escape. Now let us ride on, and see if we can't find cheer at Azalea."

Nick o' the Night saw the figures recede from before him, and heard them, talking still, resume their ride toward the house.

"This is a night of fortune for me," he said, in a voice of satisfaction. "The trap which you will set for Nick o' the Night will never be sprung, my good Hugh Latimer. So you curse the hand that drew Helen from the waters? You must cut your cards very straight if the same hand does not smite you. Good-night, my loyal gentlemen, and Helen Latimer a good-night."

He did not deposit his message in the tree, but rode down the avenue, and out once more beneath the starlit skies.

Then Santee galloped away, and soon the first streaks of dawn, like long arrows, fell over the trio.

The horse did not check his speed until he entered the suburbs of a canebrake, where, over the narrow path and rough, he cautiously picked his way.

Nick o' the Night seemed to dismiss all fears with his arrival in the brake, for he began to imitate a bright plumed bird that was welcoming the cloudless moon.

On, on he rode, until the canes grew sparser, and at length his nickname fell from a score of lips.

He was among Marion's men.

"Just in time for breakfast," said a dapper little man, coming forward and tapping Nick o' the Night on the thigh good-naturedly. "I've got my last potato in the fire, but you shall taste it, if Congo doesn't burn it up."

The speaker smiled at his own words, and the young partisan dismounted.

He then stood side by side with the little Huguenot, whose deeds have made him immortal.

Francis Marion, the meteor of the Revolution! Nick o' the Night's shoulders were broader than Marion's, and though but sixteen, he was two inches taller than the Swamp Fox.

"Here are some dispatches that belong to Kings-ton at Dorchester," the boy said, as, with a meaning look, he handed the partisan chief the captured package.

Marion took it with a smile.

"Any news?"

"Yes; Colonel Holly with twenty-five or thirty men will be at Azalea to-night."

"Colonel Holly, of the British army?"

"Yes, general."

"Marion and his men will be there too!" was the reply of the chief, as he turned with eagerness to the reading of the dispatches.

CHAPTER III.

MARION AND HIS MEN—"STAND!"

At the historical period of which I write certain districts of the Palmetto State were the scenes of fierce, desultory warfare.

Cornwallis, having left a strong garrison in Charles-ton, had marched to Wilmington on his way to the Virginias.

Lord Rawdon had taken possession of Camden, where with argus eyes he watched the movements of the blacksmith, General Greene, and there were

British garrisons at Dorchester, Orangeburg, and other important posts in the imperiled territory.

The cause of England was brightening.

Greene had lately been severely repulsed at Guilford Court-house, and a number of the inhabitants had thrown themselves on the mercy of the royal cause.

In the district contiguous to Charleston the partisan warfare kept intensely bitter.

This scope of country was watered by several lovely rivers; it contained dense forests, dark morasses, and almost impenetrable brakes. It embraced Eutaw Springs, and the settlements of Dorchester and Monks Corners.

Here Marion and the British and Tories chased each other, now back, now forth, now pursuing, now pursued, like so many specters of Tam O'Shanter.

The little Huguenot proved himself a thorn in the side of the king's cause in the South, and with Sumter, Huger and Horry did many gallant deeds.

Here Nicholas Brandon gained his sobriquet of Nick o' the Night.

Nick o' the Night everybody, save Isaac Hayne, called him.

To the South Carolina patriot he always was Nicholas.

This boy was with his father when he fell at the sanguinary battle of Waxhaw Creek, where Tarleton shot his metal and linked his name to infamy. Then, young as he was, he had proved a thorn in the British side; but before that bloody day he had made his name a terror to the enemy.

Robbing couriers of important dispatches, ferreting out the plans of Tory leaders, leading Marion and Sumter to nocturnal victories, he had become an object of British hatred, and one that, for the good of the royal cause, must be removed.

But the well-laid plans of Tories had failed to entrap him, and the British continued to be harassed by this will-o'-the-wisp.

Hugh Latimer, the Tory, had a plan for surprising the Swamp Fox, as Marion was called by the British.

Many such plans had come to naught, but the partisan was certain that his could not fail of success.

To carry out his plans, he had invited Colonel Holly and twenty-five men from the Dorchester garrison, and at the appointed hour the detachment made its appearance at Azalea.

It was the night after the one witnessed in the events of our preceding chapters.

Hugh Latimer was delighted.

He had watched his household during the day just passed, and was confident that no members had left the premises.

Helen and her sister had remained in doors all day entertaining Captain Clayton, who had accompanied their father from the fort.

"Our movements have not been watched," the Tory said to Holly, upon the arrival of the detachment at Azalea. "For once we have outwitted Nick the Night, and to-morrow night we will swoop down upon the Swamp Fox's den, and bag the richest game in the Carolinas."

The colonel was pleased; but threw out several pickets, like the cautious soldier that he was.

The horses of the dragoons were quartered in the dense grove behind the house, while the spacious bedrooms were placed at the service of the troops.

At Holly's command the dragoons retired early, but the officers remained in the parlor with Hugh Latimer and his children.

The handsome Captain Clayton had taken a fancy to Helen, despite her patriotic sympathies, and by his acumen had drawn from her a virtual confession of love for Nick o' the Night.

"Why, captain, did he not draw me from the Ashley when none else could save?" she asked, with sparkling eyes. "Therefore, be he rebel, robber or spy, do I not owe him much?"

"Yes; but—but—"

"Prepositions do not advance conclusive arguments," and Helen burst into a laugh at the soldier's hesitation. "Sir, seriously, I count this youth whom you call Nick o' the Night, a very dear friend."

"Whose neck is in danger, Miss Helen."

"That is his look-out, sir," was the reply. "Why, he keeps your entire army in a state of fright. Your officers dare not advance for fear of him. I will wager my piano that Colonel Holly half-believes that he has borne news of his arrival at Azalea to the Swamp Fox."

Helen Latimer spoke with a triumph which she did not attempt to conceal, and her glance was at her father and his guest, who were carrying on a conversation in low tones.

Captain Clayton could not but admire her fresh Southern beauty, heightened by the light that danced in the depths of her lustrous eyes.

"Miss Helen, I deplore this war—"

"Then sheathe your sword, return to England, and leave the colonies with one enemy less."

"I cannot, being a soldier of the king. The rebellion will be subdued."

"Never! captain."

"Permit me to take issue with you on that score, Miss Helen," he said, with the grace of a cavalier.

"In the first place—"

Captain Clayton never finished the sentence. It was broken by a shrill bugle-blast that brought the occupants of the parlor to their feet, and each looked consternation into the other's eyes.

Colonel Holly drew his sword and darted a look at the Tory.

"The accursed Marion!" he said.

"That is his bugle-blast," was the reply that fell from Latimer's blanched lips.

"I'll rouse the men!" cried Captain Clayton, springing from Helen's side, and the next moment he had bounded from the room.

Hugh Latimer bit his lips with mingled rage and chagrin, while the British colonel looked accusingly at the younger daughter.

A second bugle-blast caused him to spring toward the door, which he flung madly open, and looked out into the night.

"Does it take two bugle-calls to rouse a British colonel?" said a voice from the starlight night.

"Marion will awake at the crawl of the serpent."

"Curse Marion, if you are he!" said Holly, angrily. "What do you want?"

"The immediate surrender of Colonel Holly and his twenty-five men," was the reply, stern and direct. "My name is Francis Marion, and I would inform you that the mansion is surrounded, and that your horses in the grove are already in my hands."

An oath fell from Holly's lips and he started from the door.

"Surrounded and captured!" he gasped. "Hugh Latimer, we have been betrayed!"

The Tory could not reply; his face was white as ashes, and he stamped the floor in his speechless rage.

"Betrayed! Colonel Holly?" cried Bertha Latimer. "Who could have betrayed you?"

"You young thing!" was the reply, and the colonel's finger was directed quiveringly at Helen. "She is the traitress! I tell you there's no Latimer blood in her veins. Oh! I could tear her to pieces. I could run her through with the sword that has been disgraced to night!"

With the last word on his lips, Colonel Holly started toward the young girl. He was almost blinded by rage, and might have done her violence, had the inner door not been flung wide, and Captain Clayton leaped into the room.

"Would you strike a woman?" cried the captain, throwing himself before his superior officer, with his own sword half unsheathed. "Prove her a traitress before you punish. The men will not resist. The name of the man who has demanded the surrender appalls them. We must surrender."

At that moment a figure appeared on the threshold.

It was the figure of a little man whose dark eyes sparkled like coals of fire.

"Do you surrender, colonel?" he asked, quietly, singing Holly from the group in the parlor.

"My cowardly men force me into such disgrace," was the reply, and the maddened colonel flung his sword at Marion's feet.

The Swamp Fox only smiled.

"Order your men out," he said. "We must be off."

With the poorest grace imaginable, the captured colonel mustered his dragoons before the mansion, where they were disarmed and mounted on their own horses.

Then it was discovered that twenty-five men had surrendered to twelve!

"We touch nothing that is yours, Hugh Latimer," Marion said to the Tory, who, with his daughters and numerous frightened servants, stood on the porch. "We hate to deprive you of the society of your guests; but they are wanted in another locality."

The Swamp Fox stood near Helen as he spoke, and no one saw him slip a bit of paper into her hand.

The girl's blush did not betray her.

Hugh Latimer darted Marion a look of anger, and merely said:

"Your day is coming, sir. Hugh Latimer will yet see you swing on the gallows."

Marion's reply was a derisive laugh, which did not cease until he had tipped his hat to the sisters, and turned away.

The parting between Colonel Holly and the Tory was marked with no good feeling. It was evident that the officer believed that a member of Latimer's household had betrayed him, and for such an able officer as he to be surprised and captured by Francis Marion was a severe wound to his English pride.

Gaily Captain Clayton rode away with the victors; but not before he had wished the sister pleasant dreams, and shaken hands with the crushed Tory.

The surprise was not quite complete, for several pickets remained uncaptured; but what were three dragoons to Marion when he secured a full-fledged colonel of the British army?

The little band so strangely augmented, soon disappeared, and Helen Latimer, pleased with Marion's success, hastened to her room, where, with eager eyes, she read the message which the partisan leader had slipped into her hand:

"DEAR HELEN: Blame me with the surprise. I did not want Hugh Latimer to see me with the Swamp Fox. If you can, meet me at Latty's Magnolia at eleven-to-night. I will be there. NICK."

"And so will I!" said the girl, as she finished the last sentence, and hid the message where no hands dare search for it.

The starlight was paling before the light of the rising moon, when Helen Latimer descended to the parlor, where she learned that her father, to calm his nerves, had taken an opiate and sought his couch.

Thus the outburst of passion which she expected had been postponed.

Her sister Bertha gave her a look tinted with accusation, but did not charge her with complicity with Marion in the conversation that ensued between them.

By and by the moon appeared above the horizon, and the sisters separated, Bertha seeking her boudoir, and Helen remaining in the parlor on pretense of "reading herself to sleep."

She was alone, and did not see in her fertile imagination the dark horse that galloped toward Azalea.

Down a road not far from the one traveled by Marion and his men to the plantation, dashed a human figure through the moonlight. A large dog followed at the horse's heels, and the pose of the figure in the saddle, the palmetto hat, and the long hair, proclaimed him Nick o' the Night.

The road in spots was fringed with trees which threw dark shades over it, and made the youth doubly vigilant while in the patches of gloom.

The horse was bearing him bravely along, when a harsh command to "stand" shot from one of the clumps of living fringe, and the night-rider suddenly drew rein and stopped in the middle of the road, and at the edge of the longest shadow!

"I've caught you already!" followed the command.

These words were couched in tones of fiendish triumph.

"I told you we would meet again, Mr. Nick o' the Night, and when I tell you that you robbed me of my dispatches last night, you will know who I am! My pistol is leveled at your head, and now is the time for Jotham Nettleton of the King's Horse to take revenge. I am going to scatter your rebel brains over moonshine and shadow!"

CHAPTER IV.

DRAOGON NETTLETON IS NETTELLED.

AFTER a moment's silence, Jotham Nettleton repeated his last sentence:

"Nick o' the Night, I'm going to scatter your brains over the moonshine and shadow!"

The young partisan did not reply to this.

He appeared a statue in the saddle. His eyes were fastened on the outlines of his enemy's figure, which he could make out among the trees that cast their dense shadows across the narrow road.

It was a moment of peril—a moment freighted with death!

"Aren't you going to get ready for death?" asked the dragoon, perturbed by the boy's silence.

"Ready for what?" returned the captive, in a voice of well-feigned surprise.

"Death! Is it possible that you have been asleep all this time? I will not believe it! You want to gain time."

A strange smile passed over the young night-rider's face, and without moving his head, he spoke his dog's name in a low tone.

Whig was crouched at the edge of the shadow that almost kissed Santee's foremost hoofs.

At the sound of his master's voice he crawled into the shadow unseen by the triumphant and impatient trooper.

"Jotham Nettleton, I did not hope to meet you here," said Nick o' the Night. "I am completely at your mercy, and if you are a good shot, you will not complete your triumph in a bungling manner."

"I am a good shot."

"Thanks. How came you here?"

"I will tell you, since you are to die," answered the dragoon. "I rode from Dorchester to Azalea with Colonel Holly, who will entrap the accused Swamp Fox before he returns. Twenty-five gallant dragoons are at the mansion now. I am a picket."

"Ah!" said Nick o' the Night, as if he knew naught of Colonel Holly's visit to Azalea. "You think you will capture Marion?"

"We will! I am not afraid to tell you this because—you know why."

The last word had hardly left the trooper's lips when a short, angry growl was heard in the darkened spot.

An animal, huge and strong, had darted, panther-like, from the earth, and seized the dragoon in his saddle!

It was Whig!

A cry of terror pealed from Jotham Nettleton's throat, and with the hand from which the unexpected onslaught had dashed the pistol, he boldly seized the wolfish brute, and tried to shake him off.

But in vain! The dog held onto the arm which he had seized with his teeth, and the soldier fancied that he could hear the crushing of the bones.

Added to his situation, which was not to be envied, his horse, frightened by the attack, plunged forward, to be brought to a halt by a hand that suddenly grasped the reins.

"You are mine, Jotham Nettleton!" said the young partisan, darting a look of triumph into the face of his foe. "Down, Whig, down!"

The dog released the trooper's arm, and dropped to the ground with looks of dissatisfaction, while his young master, bending forward, seized the scarlet collar.

"I ought to scatter your brains over moonshine and shadow," he said, in a stern tone, that thoroughly frightened Jotham Nettleton, who saw the muzzle of a pistol not far from his ashy face.

"Don't, Nick o' the Night! Would you kill a prisoner?"

The youth laughed.

"The king's trooper has turned suppliant, eh?" he cried, derisively. "But a moment since he was going to kill a captive. The tables have been turned, the captive is the master. I can slay or spare. On one condition, Jotham Nettleton, I do the latter."

A gleam of hope lit up the dragoon's eyes.

"Name it!"

"You must swear to fight no longer against the colonies."

A moment's silence followed.

"I am a British soldier; you fellows are rebels; King George is my king, I have sworn to fight under his banner. You would put me on a parole for life."

"I would."

"I cannot accept it," the soldier said, with deter-

mination. "I am not a prisoner of war. We do not recognize you as a belligerent; you are a brigand."

"Then I must kill you!"

"Do it, and tell Balfour that Jotham Nettleton would not desert the royal cause."

Balfour was the commandant at Charleston.

"Trooper, I can't kill such a devoted man," said Nick o' the Night. "I respect bravery, be it in my direst enemy. Were you at Waxhaw Creek?"

"Yes."

"Under Tarleton?"

"Yes."

"My father was killed there. I was at his side when he fell."

"Ah! that was a bloody battle."

"I have said that I would spare none of my captives who fought there. But I cannot kill you, Jotham Nettleton. You will not accept my proffered parole. Under the same circumstances I would not accept one from you."

"I believe that, Nick o' the Night."

The next instant the young partisan sat upright in his saddle again.

"Dragoon Nettleton, you are free!" he said. "Let me tell you something. Colonel Holly and his men are prisoners of war. While you have been picked here, Marion and his men have surrounded Azalea and captured the party."

"The Old Harry!" exclaimed the trooper.

"No, the Swamp Fox," said Nick o' the Night, with a smile, and a merry twinkle of the eye.

"Every one captured?"

"Yes."

"Holly should be cashiered and shot."

"No—promoted for preventing the effusion of blood by a gentlemanly surrender. Look at the moon, trooper; it is creeping zenithward. We must part. Do not attempt to follow me."

"I will not."

The young partisan stretched forth a hand, which the dragoon took with some show of reluctance.

"Are we enemies?" asked the boy.

"Yes," said the trooper. "I cannot forget that you robbed me of my dispatches, and disgraced me at head-quarters. I am a corporal, and the loss of my dispatches will cost me my stripes. Yes, we are enemies!"

"Then enemies let us be," was the reply. "Corporal Nettleton, good-night."

"Good-night, Nick o' the Night; if somebody shoots your dog some night, know that I did it, for he has ruined my sleeve, and the imprint of his teeth is in my arm."

The youth, who had started forward, suddenly turned and looked at the dragoon.

"Jotham Nettleton, if you touch my dog I will not hesitate to shoot you down wherever I find you!"

The trooper glanced at his torn sleeve, and then shot at the dog a look of anger.

"So be it," he said. "I am going to kill that dog!"

A moment later Nick o' the Night was riding away and one of the strangest *rencontres* of the Revolution was at an end.

The British corporal sat on his horse in the road for many moments like a man in a dream.

The startling events of the last few moments did not seem real. The sound of Santee's hoofs, still distinct, assured him that the dreadest pest of the Carolinas, so lately in his power, was riding away the victor, and his arm, through which darted excruciating pains, told him that he had not dreamed.

"His mercy makes me mad," said the dragoon, finally. "Twice I have been in his power, and as often has he spared me. Last night, when he robbed me of my dispatches, he let me go free; but the looks he darted at me puzzled me. When I first spoke he started, and to-night, while he gripped my throat, he twisted his head forty ways while he stared into my face. Curse him! yes, blame the boy who must throw dogs at his enemies. I've not done with him yet!"

The trooper paused abruptly and turned his attention to his wounded arm.

Seemingly not afraid of more enemies, he took off his cavalry jacket and bound up his bleeding member as best he could with one hand.

"If Holly has been captured, I must ride back to Dorchester alone. We expected to ride back with Marion and his men," and the corporal could not repress a laugh.

Then, having recovered his pistol from the ground, he rode away.

Meanwhile Nick o' the Night was riding toward Azalea, the scene of the capture of Colonel Holly and his men.

He did not gloat over his triumph.

On the contrary, his head rested on his breast and he seemed to be busy with perplexing thoughts.

His thoughts were perplexing.

"I'm going to ask Helen," he said at length, scarcely above a whisper. "So like, yet so unlike. I can't get him out of my mind."

Then the lips remained closed, and the ride was continued in silence.

By and by he left the road and galloped toward the river, which flowed very near to the mansion of Azalea, and a breeze that suddenly struck the young partisan's face, was laden with the perfume of azaleas and magnolia blossoms.

The horse gave a low whinny of delight when he saw the moonlit waters of the Ashley, and very soon he was bearing his young master down the picturesque bank.

"Here we are!" said Nick o' the Night, suddenly drawing rein beneath the blossomy limbs of a giant magnolia.

At his feet flowed the river whose limpid water Whig was lapping with delight, and Santee, impa-

tient for his rider to dismount, coveted the dog's freedom with wistful eyes.

Nicholas Brandon sprung to the ground a moment after the halt.

"Helen!" he called, in a low, cautious tone.

"Nick!"

There was a step deeper in the shadows, and the next moment the partisan stood face to face with Helen Latimer.

He took with eagerness the white hand that was put forth in greeting, and looked into the sparkling eyes of the beautiful girl.

"Marion did it gallantly!" she said. "Not one of Holly's men escaped."

"Marion does all his deeds gallantly," the youth answered, with swelling pride. "But I am dying to ask you a question. Helen, did you ever have a brother?"

The young girl started, and her dark blue eyes filled with wonderment.

"I never had a brother," she said.

CHAPTER V.

A FRACAS IN KING GEORGE'S FAMILY.

LEAVING Nick o' the Night and Helen Latimer at the giant tree, called Latty's Magnolia, let us seek other scenes, that we may introduce to the reader's notice a new character, who is destined to add exciting interest to our story.

It was near midnight on the self-same night of Holly's capture that two horsemen crossed the Ashley about three miles below Dorchester.

They seemed in haste, for they did not give their horses time to quench their thirst in the shimmering water; but were pricking them continually with the spur and urging them on.

Once across the river they galloped toward the old fort, the challenge of whose wakeful sentries was soon heard.

To the cry of "who comes there?" one of the horsemen replied:

"Essex Wingdon and son. We want to see the commandant immediately."

The sentry told the night-riders that the gates should be opened at once, and with scarce a minute's delay the twain disappeared beyond the portals of the nearest sally.

"Now tell the commandant that we are here on important business."

The speaker's tone was imperative.

Colonel King was roused from his dreamful slumbers, and presently received his late visitors in the little audience room of his quarters.

"You come late, but are not unwelcome," he said, with a courteous smile, as he grasped the hands of his callers. "Am I to understand that important business brings you here?"

"You are," answered the elder of the twain, a tall, muscular man of fifty and five. "Holly is captured!"

Colonel King's face suddenly grew deadly pale; he gasped for breath as he started from the speaker, and, like a man suddenly attacked, laid his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Impossible!" he cried.

"What is impossible with Francis Marion?" said the son, bitterly. "Colonel King, it is the same old story. But a few hours since the Swamp Fox rode past our plantation, and Colonel Holly was at his side."

"You may have guessed wrongly. Marion may be the prisoner."

The elder Wingdon laughed.

"Long since, then, you would have stood face to face with the Swamp Fox in this very room," he said, addressing Colonel King. "Holly has been surprised at Azalea!"

Colonel King ground his teeth in rage, and stamped the floor madly with his slipped feet. "Can nothing be done?" he cried. "Must we see our detachments cut to pieces and destroyed by such rascals as Marion and Sumter? Our secret expeditions are known to them almost before they have been decided on in council. We must put a stop to their inhuman ravages. From this hour, gentlemen, I devote my energies—every one—to the annihilation of these pests. The capture of General Holly, my old companion in arms, rouses the lion in my bosom. I will give no rest to anybody, none to my mind, until the district wherein I have the honor to serve our king has been cleansed of Marion and Sumter."

The colonel spoke with soldierly emphasis, and with the utterance of the last word his sword fell heavily across the council table.

"That is right! We are with you!" said the elder Wingdon. "But if we could strike the actual cause of our late discomfits."

King gave the speaker an inquiring look.

"To whom do you refer?" he asked.

"To that accursed boy—that spy whom they call Nick o' the Night."

The colonel's bro^r darkened.

"Yes, yes," he cried, almost savagely. "Last night he plundered a messenger from Orangeburg, and sent him dispatchless on his journey. Three nights since he led a party of rebels upon Waverly's squadron on the Santee, and decimated its ranks. You see, I remain in ignorance concerning the orders from Orangeburg, for that young villain has my papers. Gentlemen, I want to hang that boy!"

"Would you not be satisfied to know that he is dead?" asked Wingdon's son.

"Yes; but I would like to hang him!"

"Whether you hang him or not, his day of vandalism is drawing to a close," replied the youth, a strong and not unhandsome lad of seventeen. "This night I have taken an oath that Nick o' the Night shall not enjoy his triumph long."

"Your hand on that, boy!" cried Colonel King, grasping the member which young Wingdon thrust forward with pride. "Rid this district of his presence, and I will give you a captain's commission in the king's army. Colonel King is a soldier of honor."

"I know that! I hate that young rebel because he has interfered in my affairs."

"What! has he stolen your best horse?" King asked with a smile, and a cunning look at the father.

"No!"

"Meddled with your love affairs, then?"

Essex Wingdon smiled and nodded.

"Yes," answered the youth, a blush suffusing his face. "I need not keep such things from you, Colonel King. More than one year ago I met and loved Helen Latimer, the daughter of the stanch loyalist who owns Azalea. For a while I fancied that my love was returned, when an accident occurred that dissipated my fancies. Nicholas Brandon, the young brigand, saved her life and she has clung to him. More than that: I believe that she has furnished him valuable information concerning the movements of loyal detachments, which information he has, of course, communicated to the rebel leaders."

"A rebel in Latimer's household? that is bad," said the commandant.

"And so long as she remains there she will damage the royal cause."

The last speaker was the elder Wingdon.

"That is true," said King; "these rebel women are shrewd ones. So long as she remains at Azalea she will communicate with this rascally boy."

The youth looked from his commandant to his parent.

"What do you propose?" he asked the latter.

"I propose to have the girl removed from Azalea to Dorchester," was the reply. "Here she will be treated like a lady, though a prisoner, and will no longer play the spy in her father's house. No doubt she informed her lover of Colonel Holly's arrival at the plantation."

"Would you remove her without Hugh Latimer's consent?" asked the son.

"Of course he will consent," was the reply. "He hates treason, and will do anything he can to assist in crushing this rebellion."

"I like the plan," said King. "The girl shall be well cared for here, and you," to the youth, "can make love to her under the protection of the British flag."

Lancaster Wingdon smiled and blushed.

"So it is settled. The girl is to be removed to Dorchester as soon as possible."

"And Nick o' the Night run to earth!" said the Tory youth, with emphasis.

"By whom?"

"By me—Lancaster Wingdon!"

And Jotham Nettleton!

The last sentence startled the trio.

With one accord they started back and stared at the man who had flung wide the door, and was standing over the threshold.

It was dragoon Nettleton.

His appearance was enough to startle the trio to whom he had unexpectedly manifested his presence.

His face was pale and crowned with an angry expression. His left arm hung like a culprit at his side, and the torn sleeve told of the work of teeth or briars. There were dark stains on the scarlet that resembled blood.

Colonel King was the first of the conclave who found his tongue.

"Where did you come from?" he asked of Nettleton.

"From the immediate vicinity of Azalea."

"Is Holly taken?"

"Yes!"

"Tell us all about it corporal."

"I don't know much about the surprise, as I was a picket on the road which, of course, the Swamp Fox did not take. I heard nothing of it, so silently did he do his work."

"But your sleeve!"

"I'm coming to that. Give a fellow time to breathe between sentences. I was a picket, I said. I stopped Nick o' the Night. I covered him with the best pistol in South Carolina; but his dog saved him."

"His dog!"

"His dog! The brute leaped upon me, and his teeth met in my arm."

"Didn't you see the dog?"

"Unfortunately I had no eye where my left ear is," said Corporal Nettleton with sarcasm. "I want to kill that dog."

"The boy, you mean."

"No, the dog! But of course I will hunt the boy, too."

"Give me your hand, Corporal Nettleton," exclaimed Lancaster Wingdon. "We'll hunt him together."

But the dragoon shrunk from the extended hand, while he gave its owner a look of disdain.

"I'll hunt him alone!" he said. "I don't want to be incumbered with a boy."

The last sentence was rounded off with a cutting sneer.

Lancaster Wingdon's face instantly flushed with anger.

"A boy?" he retorted. "I'm your equal, Corporal Nettleton."

"My equal?" and the trooper laughed. "Were you not in the presence of the commandant I'd give you a trouncing."

The eyes of the Tory boy flashed fire at this, and the next moment he stood fuming with passion before the dragoon.

"I'm your equal in everything save years!" he cried. "You are a coward! I never permitted a boy of sixteen to rob me of my dispatches. You should be flogged before the garrison for cowardly acts, un-

becoming a soldier of the king. I'll warrant that the story you have told is a trumped-up one—that you basely deserted Colonel Holly to-night—that you—"

The sentence was broken by dragoon Nettleton's clenched hand.

It shot out suddenly from his shoulder, and, planting itself with emphasis between the young Tory's eyes, sent him reeling like a drunkard across the room!

"I'm not a coward!" cried the trooper, seeing Essex Wingdon draw his sword, and dart him a malignant look. "Nobody shall call me such in vain. That boy is no match for Nick o' the Night, who is one of the shrewdest foxes in the State. Give me a chance, and I will outwit him. I have that chance now. I know him, for I have met him."

"Liar!"

The speaker was Lancaster Wingdon, who had risen and was coming forward.

Jotham Nettleton had not struck hard. He could have knocked the young partisan senseless with the display of no great power. For the commandant's sake, he had given his visitor a comparatively light blow; therefore the quick recovery was not a surprise.

"I say you lie!" repeated the youth, rounding the table before Colonel King and his father could interpose a hand. "I'll have your blood for this, coward!"

Nettleton stepped forward.

"That word again!" shot from between his clenched teeth, and with a blow that was truly a blow he sent the young Tory like a thunderbolt against the wall.

With an oath the father darted forward; but Colonel King sprung between the combatants, and waved his hand toward the door.

"Not here, gentlemen," he said; "not here!"

The next minute Jotham Nettleton was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

A COURAGEOUS SHOT.

WE now return to the youthful twain whom we left, at the close of a preceding chapter, beneath the far-stretching limbs of Latty's Magnolia.

Helen Latimer's eyes remained full of wonderment when she asked the boy a question.

"Why do you ask whether I had a brother, Nick? I thought you knew that Bertha and I are father's sole children."

The young partisan hesitated, and his face colored beneath her look.

"I have been dreaming," he answered at length. "When a person dreams the same dream three times he is apt to think of it."

He dared not tell the fair girl of the suspicions he had lately formed.

"So you have dreamed three times that I had a brother?" she said, with a smile. "What if your dreams be true?"

He laughed and told her that he had never believed in dreams, and for the time the subject was dismissed.

Helen then narrated the story of Colonel Holly's surprise at Azalea.

"Oh! it was glorious to see that haughty man fling his sword at Marion's feet," she cried, with enthusiasm. "You know Holly is so tall, and the Swamp Fox looked like a boy in stature when he stood in the door and demanded surrender."

"But, Helen, do you think that the colonel would have struck you if Captain Clayton had not sprung before him?"

"I cannot say, but Holly was very mad. I feel that I am indebted to the gallant young captain."

"He is not my enemy," said Nick o' the Night, with pride.

"He is Bertha's lover."

"Ah!"

"I accidentally overheard a conversation between him and father yesterday, in which I understood that he came to Azalea as a wooer. Oh, Nick, I wonder if all these British officers expect to find wives in America?"

"Perhaps, but many will find graves."

"Yes. This fair State is dotted with the graves of friend and foe to-night—the soldiers of freedom and the lovers of the king. Father says we will be crushed."

"Never!" exclaimed the youth. "Never! while Washington leads the armies of freedom. Helen, America has forever broken the shackles of British slavery, and ere long will stand before the world free and clothed in the beauty of the new life. By and by we will sheathe our swords, and with one accord salute the flag that we follow day and night."

She cast the young patriot a look of admiration, and her eyes flashed as the glowing sentences fell ringing from his lips.

Helen Latimer was proud of the boy who professed to love her.

After awhile he told her that Hugh Latimer had discovered the post-office in the tree, and they were debating a course of communication for the future, when a low growl from the dog made them start.

Whig was standing on all fours, and, with bristles up, was looking toward the ford that lay a short distance down the stream. There were two dark objects in the center of the Ashley, and they were advancing slowly toward the bank on which the youthful lovers stood.

"I know them," Helen suddenly whispered. "Essex Wingdon and his son."

"Which one?"

"Lancaster."

"Do you think they are going to Azalea?"

"No, sir! They have struck to the right; they are going home."

"Ah! those gallant Tories have been to Dorches-

ter!" said Nick o' the Night. "They are hawks whose wings should be clipped. For a shilling I'd ride after them and take both down to Marion."

He made a move as if to carry out his words, when Helen touched his arm.

"Stay!" she said. "Let the Tory father and his young hotspur of a son go home unmolested. I do not get to see you often, Nick; so let us have our talk out."

He watched the riders until they were hid from view afar in the moonlight, and then turned to the girl again.

It was morning by the measurement of time, though myriads of stars still shone in the sky, when Helen Latimer with, perhaps, a kiss on her radiant forehead, stole from the river bank, and re-entered the old mansion of Azalea under cover of the oak trees' shade,

She had left the boy outlawed by British proclamation, the boy dreaded by even Lord Rawdon, and hated by every British soldier in South Carolina.

She did not dream that she would soon be an inmate of a British fort—a prisoner in sight, almost, of her own home!

Nick o' the Night mounted Santee shortly after Helen Latimer's departure, and took the road lately traveled by the two Tories.

Wingdon Hall, their estate, was not far distant, and the youth rode toward it at a brisk gallop.

As he hurried over the road his mind reverted to the rencoder with Corporal Nettleton.

He could not forget the dragoon, whose face had been photographed on the tablets of his memory. It was plain that he bore a striking resemblance to Helen Latimer; his eyes were soft and deep like hers; he had her mouth, and his voice possessed a melody that made hers so winning.

"I believe I could not kill him, though strongly provoked," the boy said at last, while his horse bore him toward Wingdon Hall. "He looks so much like Helen. I wonder if Hugh Latimer noted the resemblance, while the trooper tarried at Azalea as a member of Colonel Holly's detachment? He may call Helen his child; he may swear that Latimer blood courses through her delicate veins, but he lies. The Latimer blood is thick with love, blind devotion to the English king; Helen's blood is warmed by the love of liberty, and her heart beats fast when she hears we have put the foe to rout."

Having finished his self-communing, he glanced to the left, and saw an eminence crowned with a mansion of imposing aspect.

It was Wingdon Hall, looking beautiful in the fast fading moonlight, and beneath the golden stars.

It was the home of the Wingdons, who rejoiced when Tarleton won the infamous victory at Waxhaw Creek, and at whose board Lords Cornwallis and Rawdon had drank to the health of King George the Third.

The first Wingdon who came to America was a cavalier, whose sword flashed in the sunlight of Naseby's field, where the banners of the unfortunate Charles I. fled before the ensigns of Cromwell. Impoverished by long loyalty to the royal cause, and ill repaid from a hampered treasury by grants of land in the new world, he found his heart's Utopia on the banks of the Ashley, where he erected the mansion. A devotee of monarchy, in whose cradle he had been rocked, is it a wonder that he adhered to the royal cause during the Revolution, and that two of his sons actually drew their swords by the side of Cornwallis, and swore to assist in the suppression of American rebellion?

Lancaster, his youngest son, with a heart full of loyalty, wanted to follow his brothers' example, but was persuaded to remain at home much against his desires and resolves. He was a youth whose partisanship was very bitter, and the reader who has witnessed an exhibition of his passion, has no doubt dubbed him a true descendant of young Hotspur.

"Yonder's a nest of Tories," Nick o' the Night said, as if addressing some person at his side. "Some of these fine nights we will ride up here and break it up. I'd like to see old Wingdon froth when he finds himself Marion's prisoner, and, as for that hot-headed son of his, I'd like to cross arms with him. They say he is so strong!"

The horse having reached a road that led to the right, turned in that direction, and the youth smiled his approval.

"Santee knows the roads to Marion's camps as well as his master," and as he spoke he affectionately patted his steed's neck.

The next moment a loud voice from over his left shoulder cried "Halt!"

He started, but did not draw rein.

"Nick o' the Night, if you do not stop I'll fire!"

"Fire and be hanged! Freedom forever!"

The boy shouted these words when turned half around in the saddle, with his spurs increasing Santee's gait.

A moment of silence followed the sound of the last syllable.

Then came the sharp, whip-like report of a rifle, and a tremor passed suddenly over the young partisan's frame!"

Surely he had been struck, for he reeled like a wounded man in the saddle, and fell forward on the horse's neck!

"Faster! faster! Santee!" he cried to his steed, whose quick ears caught the words couched in accents of pain. "If I must die, let me die in Marion's camp. Oh! Lancaster Wingdon, if I live I will pay you for this cowardly shot!"

The horse darted forward like the wind. He seemed to know that his young rider was badly wounded, and ere long he began to smell the warm blood that trickled over his neck.

A moment after the shot another horse was on the road.

But his rider sat bolt upright in the saddle, and his spurs were red with blood.

It was Lancaster Wingdon, the young Tory, and he was pursuing the boy whom he knew his ball had wounded.

But Santeo was a horse of tried mettle, and the Tory youth soon found that he pursued in vain, and gave up the chase.

He saw the dark horse disappear before he turned toward the old loyalist, who awaited his return with much rejoicing.

"I've settled accounts with Nick o' the Night at last," he said with triumph. "Not only have I done the royal cause great service, but I have removed a dangerous rival. Now, no person stands between me and Helen Latimer!"

As he rode back he moved his hand over his face, which appeared much swollen, and then felt the back of his head.

"I can't decide," he said, with a smile, "which hurt the worse—Nettleton's fist or the wall. It appears to me that Colonel King's walls are uncomely hard."

The laugh he gave had a melancholy sound, and a moment later he hissed these words:

"Jotham Nettleton, if you were Lord Cornwallis I'd pay you for your dastardly blow. When you struck me you trampled on a scorpion that will sting you to death! You may live to kill the dog, but I have killed the master!"

Rejoicing over the result of his shot, Lancaster Wingdon assured his father that Nick o' the Night would never annoy the royal cause again.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHANGE OF RESIDENCE.

It was morning when Hugh Latimer recovered from the effects of the opiate, and left his couch.

His sleep had been disturbed by weird dreams, and his face looked pale and haggard. The events of the night just passed—the capture of Colonel Holly, and the branding of Helen as a traitress—did not recur to him when he opened his eyes and began to collect his thoughts.

His first act was the summoning of a colored servant to his room.

"Has the colonel risen yet?"

The eyes of the black suddenly distended, and filled with a ludicrous look of incredulity.

"De cunnel, massa? Why, hab you forgotten dat de Swamp Fox done took 'im away last night?"

The next moment Hugh Latimer's mind was itself again, and with an exclamation of chagrin he waved the slave aside and was alone once more.

"Yes, yes!" he hissed, clutching his hands till the nails bruised the whitened palms. "That accursed Marion did ride down here last night, and rob me of my guests. He always comes like a thief in the night, for he never fights like a Christian and a gentleman. To-night we were to have fallen on him in his lair; but the game is up now. What will they say of this disaster at Dorchester?" the Tory asked himself, after a brief pause. "I promised King that Colonel Holly should deliver the Swamp Fox into his hands. They may think that I am a rebel, sailing under false colors. I must go in person to the fort, and clear my skirts of suspicion. To some the case may look dark against me, but I swear that King George can boast of no adherent more loyal to his crown than Hugh Latimer!"

He uttered a truth that none who knew him dare question.

After a while he left his chamber and hastened to the eastern wing of the mansion where his knuckles rapped lightly, but with a sign of impatience, on a door.

Presently he heard a step beyond the portal, the knob of which was soon turned.

"Is it you, sister?"

"No, it is I," answered the Tory. "Helen, are you dressed?"

He was answered by the opening of the door, and he stood face to face with Helen, whose fair cheeks were paler than usual.

She retreated involuntarily from the look he cast upon her, as he stepped across the threshold, and shut the door with an angry sweep of the hand.

"I want to talk with you!" he said, and as the last word dropped from his lips he seized her arm and drew her toward him. "Helen Latimer, you have disgraced the man who has provided a shelter for your head since the days of your babyhood. You have played the role of a spy beneath the roof of Azalea; you have furnished the rebel brigands with valuable information, and last night your double dealing culminated in a new disgrace to the royal cause. I ought to turn you over to the tender mercies of Colonel Balfour, or, Brutus-like, make my slaves punish you as you deserve in my presence. I curse the day that brought you into the world, spy, traitress, despoiler of the name of Latimer!"

His eyes flashed like the orbs of the maddened tiger, and while the hot epithets of his last sentence fell from his lips, he shook the young girl till her teeth chattered, like those of an ague-stricken person.

"Last night!" Helen Latimer cried, when she found that she could use her tongue. "What did I do to bring about the surprise of Colonel Holly?"

"What did you not do, you spying girl?" cried the Tory. "You communicated with that young imp of Satan, Nick o' the Night; you told him that Holly and his men were here!"

"I dare you to the proof!" Helen answered, with an air of triumph. "I did not communicate with him on the subject. He discovered the game by the assistance of one Hugh Latimer."

The Tory started, and his grip tightened on the girl's arm.

"No, lies, girl!" he cried, threateningly.

"You shall have none," was the firm reply. "Night before last you rode from Dorchester with Captain Clayton. While in the avenue of oaks, you talked about Colonel Holly's expedition. You were overheard."

"By whom?" he asked, with a sneer.

"By Nick o' the Night!"

The next instant Helen's arm was released.

"Was that spying boy so near?"

"He might have touched you with his sword."

"How did you learn this?"

She hesitated, and her eyes, beneath his accusing look, fell to the floor.

"Tell me!" he cried, springing forward, "who told you all this?"

She looked up, with a proud light in her eyes that made him angrier than ever.

"The boy himself."

"Nick o' the Night?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Where?"

"Sir, I am not obliged to answer inquiries I deem impertinent," she replied.

"Sir, to me?" hissed the Tory, maddened beyond control. "Sir, to your father, whose English heart is wrung by your dastardly betrayal of the cause of his king! Helen Latimer, I could fling you against yon wall and crush out your rebellious life. But I will put an end to the rebellious plans that have been matured beneath my roof. The day of your treason has drawn to a close. I have put up with it until driven to the verge of the precipice of ruin; I must turn and strike it down to save the honored name of Latimer. I command you not to stir from this house to-day. My men will watch you—my men whom your beauty and your gold cannot bribe. Helen Latimer, I wish you slept with your mother, whose grave is unmarked because it is unknown!"

The last words fell from his white lips with the sound of water dropping on red-hot steel, and his countenance was the incarnation of hate and madness.

Still it did not prevent the fair young object of his dislike from springing toward him as he turned on his heel, before the echoes of his final word had died in the room.

"My mother!" she cried; "tell me about my mother! Hugh Latimer, until this day I have never heard you speak of her. I have dreamed of her, and while I dreamed I felt gentle fingers in my hair, and kisses on my forehead. I have longed to know of her. Tell me how old I was when Heaven robbed me of her love?"

"Her love!" hissed Hugh Latimer, turning suddenly upon the girl, who confronted him with outstretched arms. "Your mother never loved you, Helen Latimer; to the day of her death she hated you."

The young girl groaned.

"I will not believe you!" she cried. "You are torturing my heart with falsehood. But enough. If you will not tell me about her who gave me birth, you will not refuse to tell me if I ever had a brother?"

The Tory started like a man suddenly accused of a crime which had in secret been committed.

"Who told you to ask these questions?" he cried.

"If you had a brother, what is it to you?"

"The satisfaction of knowing it. I now know that I had a brother."

"You had!" exclaimed the Tory; "but he is as dead as Chelsca!" and with the last word he turned for the second time and shut the door in her face.

"Nick's dream is more than a dream," Helen said before Hugh Latimer's feet had ceased to sound in the corridor. "I had a brother once; but he says that he is dead. Shall I believe him? He hated my mother! why, then, would he not lie about my brother?"

She walked to the couch from which she had lately risen, and threw herself upon it to brood in silence and with hidden face over the events of the last few moments.

As for the Tory, he went below, swallowed a hasty breakfast, and rode from Azalea unattended.

About noon he returned, and ordered the ebony hostler to saddle two horses.

"Put Helen's saddle on Chestnut," he said, then resigned his own steed to the servant's charge and entered the mansion.

Despite the Tory's efforts to remain composed, his nervousness betrayed him.

He directed his steps to Helen's boudoir, the door of which he opened without ceremony, and found the young girl embroidering at the window.

"Helen Latimer!"

She started at the sound of his voice, and the needlework almost dropped from her hand.

"You are going to take a ride with me," he continued. "Ask no questions now, for I will not answer you; but put on your riding-habit and be at the block as soon as possible."

Then he disappeared, leaving the girl in a state of bewilderment, in which she confusedly tried to guess the destination of her coming journey.

With her mind full of conjectures, she donned a neat and somewhat costly riding-habit, and met Hugh Latimer at the mounting block at the edge of the porch below.

He greeted her with a smile that praised her dispatch, and without a word assisted her into the silken saddle on the back of Chestnut, her favorite horse.

"Where is your mistress, Bertha?" she asked a servant, who was looking on with wondering eyes.

"We cannot wait," the Tory said, tartly. "You will come back by and by, and then you will see Bertha often."

A moment later Hugh Latimer spoke to his horse, and rode from the mansion with Helen by his side.

He was morose and thoughtful, and the girl, fearful of causing an outburst of passion, did not speak. She felt that the present strange journey had resulted from the Tory's morning ride, and when they crossed a certain murmuring tributary of the Ashley, she began to believe that Fort Dorchester was her destination.

At last, as if to confirm her belief, the British flag greeted her vision, and half an hour later she entered at the sally-port, and found herself observed and admired by the soldiers that comprised the garrison.

During the ride from Azalea she had not exchanged a single word with her conductor. But when they drew near to Colonel King's quarters she unsealed her lips.

"Are you not afraid to bring me here? I might tell Marion the strength and situation of the garrison!"

She spoke in a sarcastic tone, and there was a mischievous twinkle in her dark eyes.

"Afraid? No!" said the Tory, with a triumph that, like a prisoner, suddenly burst its bonds. "Helen Latimer, until I see fit to take you back to Azalea, Fort Dorchester is to be your home. You are a prisoner under the eye of Colonel King!"

The terrible truth flashed upon Helen's mind before he had finished.

She was a prisoner in a British fort!

A moment's silence followed the Tory's last triumphant sentence, and Helen was about to reply, when Colonel King was seen advancing toward them.

The commandant was clad in full uniform, and bowed with the grace of a cavalier to the girl, who could not but admire his faultless form and features.

"Here is the rebel I spoke of this morning," said the Tory, smiling. "Miss Helen Latimer!"

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD ENEMIES WILL MEET.

HELEN LATIMER'S imprisonment was followed by a number of days devoid of exciting interest.

It is true that the red-coats chased partisans and vice versa; but nothing worthy of notice in the lives of several of our characters occurred.

Helen could not complain of ill-treatment at the hands of Colonel King. He was a polite officer who had a family in England, and who showed his captive many little favors because she reminded him of his own youngest daughter. Still he was quite strict, but though watched by one so kind, with argus eye, Helen did not murmur.

A rumor of Nick o' the Night's death reached Dorchester several days after the girl's delivery over to the garrison.

Colonel King at first placed no credence in the report, and Jotham Nettleton, the dragoon, laughed when he heard it. But, by and by circumstances gave coloring to the story, which at length reached Helen Latimer's ears.

Couriers traversed the country between Orangeburg and Dorchester without molestation, and dispatches from Rawdon, who was concentrating his forces near Camden in the north, came through with safety. As if to confirm the reports, Colonel Holly and his men, paroled by Marion, returned to the old town. They declared that the boy had not been seen for five days, and the colonel said that Marion feared that a hostile bullet had terminated his adventurous career.

"If he is dead, why don't his slayer come forward and proclaim his deed?" dragoon Nettleton would exclaim. "I tell you, boys, that I don't believe a word of it, and to prove that he is living I will agree to hunt him up and enlighten you with the truth."

At last there remained in Dorchester but two persons who refused to believe the well-substantiated reports of the young partisan's death.

They were Helen Latimer and the dragoon.

Lancaster Wingdon, who, as the reader will recall, fired the shot that stretched Nick o' the Night on his horse's neck, visited the fort on the day that followed Helen's incarceration.

He was surprised to learn that Hugh Latimer had anticipated his own plan of carrying the young girl to the fort, for the purpose of preventing her from getting valuable information to the patriots, and he was pleased to know that the Tory had taken the matter into his own hands.

He gave credence to the rumors of his rival's death, but did not father the fatal moonlight shot.

As he came to Dorchester as Helen's lover, he did not wish her to know that he was responsible for the painful reports. By and by he could come out openly and receive praise for his deadly aim. He felt certain that his ball had wrought speedy death, and it was with difficulty that he could keep his triumph from Colonel King. But he was afraid to make that officer his confidant, and so he came often to the town and fort, telling no one his secret.

During these visits he did not encounter Corporal Nettleton.

There existed a hatred between these two persons that increased as the days waned, and Colonel King looked at the young Tory's visits with much uneasiness. He feared that the two enemies would meet again, and that deadly blows would be the result. Therefore, he took care to keep Lancaster Wingdon at his head-quarters during his brief sojourn at the fort, in order that he might not encounter the man whom he hated with all the bitterness of the human heart.

The corporal despised the youthful scion of the Tory house. The epithets which he had bestowed burned in his heart, and he was but biding his time.

"He called me coward, and for that word I'll wring his neck!" the dragoon said, time after time.

He did not open the flood-gates of his wrath to the

Nick o' the Night.

commandant, but there were a few members of the garrison who knew how he longed to punish the young Tory. These were men who did not like Lancaster Wingdon, who, they were wont to say, was too cowardly to take up arms for the king.

Thus the reader has seen that the youth possessed enemies who fought for King George—men who hated him for his name and social station.

Dragoon Nettleton was a brave man. He threw off his scarlet uniform, put aside his British sword and scoured the country in citizen's dress for Nick o' the Night. He rode alone down roads frequented by Sumter's troopers and followed Marion's daring raiders across fields and over hills. Now and then he would ride into Dorchester, where, after a day's rest he would spring into the saddle, and ride forth intent upon solving the uncertainty that hung over Nicholas Brandon's fate.

The purport of Lancaster Wingdon's visit to Dorchester did not escape the corporal's penetration.

He saw that he came in the capacity of a lover, and that Helen did not return the adoration that he offered on the altar of her beauty.

"The girl don't like Tories, my young fellow," the trooper would often say. "In the private opinion of Corporal Nettleton of the Royal Horse, she thinks much of that wild boy who they say is dead. I am of a mind to constitute myself her guardian, just for the purpose of kicking that young king's man for persecuting her with his presence."

One starlit night saw Jotham Nettleton's horse drinking in the middle of a ford.

The man that filled the saddle did not resemble the dragoon.

He was clad in a countryman's shabby dress, and an uncouth sand-colored beard hid much of his face. He wore a sword whose blade had been fashioned from a saw by the strong arm of some patriot smith, and a rough-looking pistol stuck in a heavy leathern belt.

He looked like a partisan—a Tory—but despite his looks he was Jotham Nettleton, the good-looking dragoon of the royal army.

Why this startling metamorphosis? Why was he alone in the middle of the Ashley, exposed to the bullet of some ally of the very cause he served?

The solution of the mystery will soon be known to the reader.

The hour was late, and the disguised trooper was about to advance when he heard a voice on the bank which he had lately left.

Then there was a step in the water, and Jotham Nettleton glanced over his shoulder.

He saw a horseman in the ford, and the plashing of water assured the dragoon a reconnoiter could not be avoided.

"If he be a rebel I'll hob-nob with him," he murmured. "If he be a Tory I'll frighten him out of his wits."

Unconscious, as it seemed, of the dragoon's proximity, the new-comer advanced across the stream, and all at once stopped to allow his horse to quench his thirst.

Jotham Nettleton could have touched him with his sword.

He was surprised that the night-rider had not noticed him. Was he asleep in the saddle? Below the twain flowed the lucent waters of South Carolina's historic river, and the stars over their heads were reflected in the bosom of the stream.

The dragoon's horse saw the steed that drank near by, but did not manifest his presence with the usual salutation—a whinny. He seemed to know that his master desired silence, and his look at the other horse and his rider was big with equine curiosity.

Jotham Nettleton never took his eyes from the person who sat so near him in the starlight, and when he saw him gather up the reins which had fallen on the neck of his steed, he raised his right hand.

The next moment the two men were together, and the trooper had jerked the other from his saddle.

"I've made a good catch!" he cried, in triumph. "It isn't every night that a patriot can secure such game. I don't want your horse," and he struck his captive's steed with his spur, and saw him gallop through the water and down the dim bank.

"You're one of the meanest Tories in these parts," the dragoon continued, holding his prisoner with a grip of iron. "Your father serves the king like a man, but you go about the country insulting the very men who crossed the ocean to stand between your dirty neck and rebel ropes. Lancaster Wingdon, I've a mind to fling you into the water and ride over you."

"Mercy!" gasped the young Tory, who did not recognize in the bearded face the features of his old enemy, Jotham Nettleton. "I am your prisoner. Take me down to Marion, and let me be treated as a prisoner of war."

"I dispose of you, sir," was the pitiless reply. "Do not think that I am going to take your worthless life. I wouldn't have your cowardly blood on my hands for the riches of Golconda. I would not dirty this pure water with your body; but I will cause you to remember this meeting."

With the last words on his lips the dragoon urged his horse forward with a light touch of the spurs, and a minute later they were on the bank.

"Do you see you light?" asked the trooper, pointing toward a light that looked like a star.

"I do. It is the lamp in my father's library."

"That is right," said Nettleton, with a smile. "Did that father ever whip you?"

Lancaster Wingdon gave his captor a look of indignation.

"My back has never felt the rod," he answered, with a certain glow of pride.

"Then it shall feel it!" said the dragoon. "Here is a tree. I have the cords."

The young Tory's face flushed at the threatened castigation, and he ground his teeth with unspeakable rage when the trooper dismounting set him on the ground.

"Are you really going to whip me?"

"I am. Take off your coat!"

Lancaster Wingdon hesitated, but the hand of his enemy was on his shoulder, and he sullenly obeyed the command.

Then the dragoon produced some strong cords from an inner pocket, and bound his indignant victim to the graceful tree that grew on the bank.

During the process of binding, not a word passed between the twain, and the brief silence that followed the task was painful in the extreme.

It was broken by Jotham Nettleton, who held several stout withes in his right hand.

"Are you ready?" he asked his captive.

Lancaster Wingdon did not reply.

A moment later the air was cut by the descending withes, which fell heavily on the young Tory's back.

Again and again they struck the dragoon's victim, with a force that made the tender flesh quiver, and reddened the skin with blood.

Lancaster Wingdon did not groan. He held his indignant cheek against the tree, and gritted his teeth till they threatened to burst.

"There!" exclaimed the dragoon, throwing the broken withes at his feet. "I have given you a first-class trouncing. You may go home and tell old Essex Wingdon how I punished you for your impudence. Don't cross my path again. It may not be a trouncing next time."

It was with difficulty that the young man could stand when his persecutor released him from the tree, and the dragoon laughed to see his exhaustion.

"Good-night, Mr. Wingdon!" he said, with mock civility. "A Tory's hide is soon tanned. I will see Nick o' the Night ere long, and I'll tell him how I trounced you."

Lancaster Wingdon gave the disguised dragoon a look of invertebrate hatred and revenge, and saw him mount his horse and ride away.

In after days Jotham Nettleton reaped the fruits of the seed which he sowed that night on the banks of the starlit Ashley.

When the morning dawned he came in sight of a dense wood which he boldly penetrated.

He did not proceed far before he was halted by a horseman, who inquired concerning his destination.

"I want to fight with Francis Marion for liberty," he replied to the querier. "Freedom needs swords now, and I come to offer my humble but trusty weapon to the Swamp Fox."

The picket, after giving Jotham Nettleton a look of scrutiny, put out his hand.

"I welcome you, fellow," he said. "We need a few more good swords, and your arm looks strong."

"It can drive my sword to a red-coat's shoulder!" said the trooper. "Marion has but to try me to find me true metal."

"We'll see the general."

A few moments later Jotham Nettleton of the Royal Horse found himself in one of Francis Marion's camps.

Among the patriots he acted well the role he was playing, fully aware that discovery meant death.

By and by he stood face to face with Marion, whose eagle look seemed to read the very secrets of his breast.

CHAPTER IX.

A SCENE IN MARION'S CAMP.

NIGHT in the partisan camp.

It was Marion's camp in the center of the dense greenwood, where we left Jotham Nettleton, who, as William Laurens, had enrolled himself in the patriot ranks.

The men were scattered throughout the little encampment singly and in groups. Some were cleaning pistols and sharpening swords, while others discussed the prospects of peace and wondered when their leader would call them to the saddle for another nocturnal foray.

Marion himself sat near a smoldering fire, interested, as it seemed, in the roasting of some tempting potatoes which Congo's swarthy hands had thrust into the admixture of ashes and coals. Near him sat one of his trusty sub-lieutenants, who watched his leader's face, which in the light of the fire was a study. Careworn and haggard, it was: but now and then the dark eyes would flash with the light of battle. With his eyes wide open, Marion was thinking of exciting times—nay, he was dreaming of the capture and the gallant chase.

Over this scene a sky dark but dotted with stars.

The greenwood was one of the fortresses of America, and its inmates were the heroes who could sing:

Our band is few, but true and tried,
Our leader frank and bold;
The British soldier trembles
When Marion's name is told.
Our fortress is the good greenwood,
Our tent the forest tree;
We know the forest round us
As seamen know the sea;
We know its walls of thorny vines,
Its glades of reedy grass,
Its safe and silent islands
Within the dark morass.

Little did those gallant patriots dream that their deeds were to go down to the "latest of time," encircled by a halo of glory such as only Immortality bestows.

Their good swords rust,
Their steeds are dust;
But their souls are with the saints, we trust."

Immortal, gallant Marion's men!

A few were sleeping, but the great majority of the denizens of the camp were wide awake and engaged in the various occupations I have mentioned.

Marion did not remove his gaze from the heap of coals until Congo drew the roasted potatoes forth, and, with a smile, assured his master that they were done to a nicely.

Then the partisan looked at the subaltern who moved forward.

"I am afraid he will not come!" the general said, with anxiety manifest on his troubled countenance.

"He may not come to-night," was the reply, "but the messenger said that he would surely be here, and you know, general, that he has never failed to keep his word."

"Never!" said Marion. "I am anxious to see the boy. To tell the truth, Wolcott, he is a power of strength to the cause of liberty in the South, and I am not surprised to learn that Lord Rawdon has sent a proclamation from Canada outlawing him."

The partisan leader was still talking, when several of the soldiers started to their feet, and exclamations of surprise and joy fell from a score of lips.

"Look, general!" cried Wolcott, clutching Marion's arm. "The boy!"

Marion turned and beheld two persons approaching his camp-fire. They were well mounted and a huge dog walked before one of the steeds.

The canine was wagging his tail and showing other signs of delight.

The Swamp Fox sprung to his feet, and caring not for the sword that fell from his lap, darted forward, and seized the hands of the first rider.

"Out again, boy!" he cried. "We heard all about it yesterday. A bullet under the shoulder and through the lungs."

The chief's fervent pressure was returned, and though the face that looked down upon him was haggard and white, it was, nevertheless, the face of Nick o' the Night!

"I've had a siege of it!" replied the boy, in a voice not as strong as the old healthy one, "but I worried it through. Once more I am in the saddle, and again I can draw for freedom the sword almost sheathed and forever by a bullet in the back."

He was dismounting while speaking and the crowd that had surrounded him scattered at a glance from Marion.

"Who did it, Nicholas?" the Huguenot asked, with great eagerness. "I told Wolcott yesterday that I longed to ask you this question."

The young partisan gritted his teeth.

"It's a pity that you don't know," resumed Marion, misinterpreting Nick's silence.

"Who says I don't know?" cried the boy, with flashing eyes. "I know who shot me in the back. I never shoot a man there! Never!"

The patriots exchanged significant glances.

"If he knows who shot him, King George can't save the fellow," said a man to his companion.

"King George! who's talking about the old imbecile in Marion's camp?" cried a stalwart Carolinian, turning suddenly upon the speaker. "Oh! it's you, Mr. Laurens," he continued, seeing that the speaker was the new recruit—the disguised dragoon. "When we talk about King George, it is in derision. He save the fellow who shot Nick o' the Night? There's no salvation in the old crown-wearer; there's much in the swords we have drawn in the swamps and woods of the Santee!"

The new recruit's gaze fell abashed before the eyes of the giant, and he felt that he had spoken too hastily.

"True!" he said. "We'll try to teach King George a lesson."

Then his gaze returned to Nick o' the Night, to learn whose fate he had boldly entered the jaws of death.

"Look at that dog!" suddenly cried a partisan. "He's counting the band to see if anybody's missing."

His remarks, which called forth a laugh, caused a number of soldiers to watch the movements of Whig, who seemed to be counting the patriot ranks.

He would hasten from one soldier to the other, casting a look into the face of each, and supplement the recognition by a wagging of his tail.

Jotham Nettleton, or William Laurens, as he was called in the camp, tried to avoid the sagacious canine. He did not push forward for inspection; on the contrary, he drew back as if to avoid the novel inspector.

But the animal did not intend that he should escape so easily.

He snuffed the dragoon through the ranks of men that hid him from view, and made an effort to get to him.

"Let the inspector-general through," cried one of the partisans. "He wants to count Laurens, our new recruit."

The ranks parted, and the next moment the canine, with bristles up and fiery eyes, confronted the dragoon, who, in self-defense, had turned at the first growl!

"Don't run, Laurens!" shouted half a dozen voices whose owners saw the trooper's face pale suddenly. "Stand up to the dog. He wants to become acquainted. You'll be as thick as two Tories after a while!"

But the man thus suddenly brought to bay did not relish such a process of introduction. He looked at the dog whose growls were short and savage, and then glanced half-imperiously at the amused spectators.

A minute had not passed since the opening of the patriot ranks, and the stirring tableau was suddenly broken by an action almost wholly unlooked for.

The furious dog crouched suddenly like the North American panther, and several partisans divining

His intentions, sprung forward to seize him, but too late!

He sprung up and forward with a short, sharp growl of rage, and alighted on the dragoon's breast. Man and beast went to the ground together, the dog uppermost.

A cry of horror rose from the throats of the startled spectators, a number of whom leaped forward to wrench the maddened animal from his victim.

It was the work of a moment for several pairs of hands to tear the dog from the prostrate yet struggling dragoon, and when Whig was hurled back and held by strong men, there was a great patch of sandy hair in his mouth.

The new recruit was helped to his feet, and there was a cry of astonishment in the camp.

The sandy beard was gone, and Jotham Nettleton stood revealed in his decidedly English cast of countenance.

"A spy! a spy!" was the cry that swelled in Marion's camp. "Whig has revealed one of King George's men!"

Jotham Nettleton could not fly. The stern patriots hemmed him in on every side, and fully twenty pistols and sabers flashed in his face.

"Where's the spy?" cried the voice of a little man who bounded among the clamorous partisans like a rocket.

It was Marion, and the ranks parted to admit him to the presence of the unmasked dragoon.

But the partisan chief was not alone. Nick o' the Night was by his side, and when his eyes fell upon the new recruit he exclaimed:

"Jotham Nettleton of the Royal Horse!"

"Who?" asked Marion, refusing to credit the evidence of his ears. "An English trooper in our camp as a spy? By the soul of liberty! he shall not escape to tell the tale."

The little Huguenot's sword was drawn, and, with clamors for the spy's death floating starward, he sprang at him with an ejaculation of rage.

"Stop!" said Nick o' the Night, suddenly seizing the general's shoulder. "Let me say one word!"

CHAPTER X.

A BULLET INSTEAD OF A ROPE.

THE young partisan's dog had not forgotten the man whom he had encountered on several occasions prior to his visit in disguise to Marion's secluded camp.

Canine sagacity had unmixed the British spy among the men who did not know how to spare such a character.

Jotham Nettleton's doom was sealed when Marion learned that he was an English dragoon, and when the youth grasped his shoulder, the partisan chief gave him a look which said: "I command here!"

The reader will recollect the words that fell from the boy's lips when he arrested the general's haste: "Hold, general! let me say a word!"

"A word for whom?" cried Marion.

"For the soldier who has fallen into our hands."

The partisans exchanged looks of astonishment. They had never dreamed that Nick o' the Night would intercede in behalf of a British spy, and to them his action was unaccountable.

"He is a brave man," said the boy. "I have seen his bravery put to the test, and he is fighting for the king because he loves the royal cause. Those who sent such a brave man on this dangerous mission—"

"Hold!" said the dragoon, stepping forward suddenly, and waving his hand as a sign for silence on the youth's part. "My superiors did not send me on this mission. I came of my own accord. I desired to solve the mystery that has been hanging over the fate of that boy. I would have left your camp," he continued, looking at Marion, "before sunrise if the dog had not unmasked me. The boy is alive, and my mission would have been ended. I did not seek to know the numbers of your band. From me Colonel King might not have learned a thing about you. Jotham Nettleton, of the Royal Horse, is in your power. He shall not beg for mercy—a Nettleton never begs!"

The last words, spoken with rising pride, were followed by a painful silence.

The fate of the spy rested with Marion, on whom all eyes were fixed, and on whose wan and stern face the firelight lay.

A minute elapsed before the silence in the camp was broken.

Then the Swamp Fox opened his mouth:

"I see that you are a brave man," he said to the prisoner; "but there are rules of war to which we must adhere in order to protect ourselves. We are the weaker party—we are men whose swords have been drawn for freedom, and we more than others, who may be battling in other quarters of the globe, must punish the spy. Jotham Nettleton, console yourself with the thought that other Englishmen have died like men."

"Like men! like Englishmen!" said the spy.

"Then I am to die?"

"You must be hung!"

The last word made the soldier blush with indignation.

"When?" he asked.

"To-night—now!"

"I am ready. I had always wished to die at night."

Nick o' the Night looked at the man through his dark lashes that shaded his eyes.

There was no tremor on the well-molded lips, and the cheeks were not pale with the fear of the approaching ordeal.

He would have spoken again for the dragoon; but he feared that his good offices would be repulsed, and, therefore, he held his peace.

The preliminaries of the execution were performed in the light of the camp-fires. Having given the

prisoner into the charge of a lieutenant, Marion returned to his potatoes, which lay at the edge of the fire, and was breaking them for his repast.

He heard the lieutenant's "forward, march," and turned his head to see a body of men departing from the camp.

Jotham Nettleton was being led to execution!

Though such scenes were rare in Marion's camp, the partisan leader did not take much notice of it. He felt that the trooper was a spy, and that he, according to the law of war, and the circumstances, deserved death. Colonel King had lately executed a partisan, caught after nightfall near Dorchester, and contrary to the letter received from Marion—a letter which was an eloquent appeal for mercy, because of the captive's wife and little ones—hung him within sight of his home.

The inhumanity had aroused the lion of the Huguenot's nature, and when pronouncing sentence on the dragoon, he thought of Colonel King's reply to his note:

"Colonel King will hang Francis Marion when he catches him."

The Swamp Fox ate his potatoes alone for several minutes.

At the end of that time he was joined by Nick o' the Night, whom he greeted with cordiality.

"Trooper Nettleton is a gallant fellow," Marion said, recurring at once to the man being led to the gallows-tree on the bank of a small but deep tributary of the Ashley. "But we cannot spare spies for that. Boy, I appreciated your love of bravery; but I could not save. That dog of yours is worth his weight in gold. He has done the cause a valuable service."

Nick o' the Night glanced at Whig, who was looking up into Marion's face as if he understood the compliment.

"He has saved my life upon several occasions," he said. "Once when I was at the mercy of trooper Nettleton's pistol."

The chief gave the young partisan a look of amazement.

"And yet you plead for him?"

"Yes, general. Will you listen to a strange story?"

There was a something in the speaker's tone that riveted Marion's gaze to his face, and the partisan leader was instantly all attention.

"I am ready to listen to anything," he said. "Talk fast, for I am always eager to get to the end of a narrative."

Nick o' the Night did talk fast. He talked as if he were going to save a life at that moment in jeopardy, and it was curious to see how the general dwelt on the words that fell in quick succession from his lips.

For the first time in his young life, the youthful partisan unburdened his heart to man.

With a flushed face he told Marion of his love for Helen Latimer, the stanch loyalist's daughter—told it with a little stammering, which amused the general, but told it well. He recited his suspicions concerning Helen's true parentage, and did not hesitate to declare that Hugh Latimer was not her father. He told of the remarkable resemblance between Helen and Jotham Nettleton, and then paused to note the effect which his somewhat lengthy narrative had produced.

Marion was silent, but not a little excited.

"They are brother and sister!" cried the boy. "I know it! The secret of Helen's parentage is buried in his breast, and he can expose the crimes of Hugh Latimer. He has been to Azalea; but I do not think that he dreams of the true state of affairs. He may have been young when Helen was separated from him. I feel, away down in my heart, that I have not guessed wrongly. General Marion, you are hanging the brother of Helen Latimer, whose heart is ever beating for the cause of liberty."

The boy's eyes were flashing while the words fell full of passion, from his lips.

The last sentence brought the general to his feet.

"Do you really believe it?" he cried, grasping the boy's arm.

"I do—I do! He is her brother."

Marion started forward.

"Then he shall not die!" he cried. "But they are down at the Wishaw, and an hour has passed since they left."

Nick o' the Night felt a pallor sweep across his face.

"If we are quick we may not be too late. They went on foot."

The Swamp Fox was excited. He thought of nothing save the rescue of Jotham Nettleton, the British spy.

A minute later two horses were pushing through the greenwood, and the saddles were filled by the twain so eager to save.

Not a word was spoken till the couple emerged suddenly into the starlight, when the report of a gun reached their ears.

Marion gave his companion a quick glance.

"That was down at the creek!" he said, and the reply that the boy gave was lost to the General's ears, for his steed, struck fiercely by the spurs, had darted forward like a projectile from a catapult.

No other shot greeted the ears of the twain, who cut the air in their rapid gallop toward the creek.

Where was the little tributary? Miles and miles away it seemed to the boy, who kept at Marion's side. Would they never reach the place of execution? What did that startling shot mean?

At length the voices of men were heard, and the two riders found a group of excited partisans on the bank of the creek, not quite a mile from the edge of the wood.

"Where's the spy?" demanded Marion, drawing rein in the very heart of the group, and on the edge

of the bank fifty feet below which flowed the dark waters toward the Ashley.

The men started from the countenance of their chief, and their tongues seemed incapable of speech.

"Where's the spy?" thundered the Huguenot. "I want somebody to answer me!"

Nick o' the Night held his breath when he heard a word fall from the lieutenant's lips.

"We brought him to this spot," the officer said, coming toward Marion.

"No minute report, Wolcott," interrupted the Swamp Fox. "Did you hang him?"

"No!"

The eagle eye of the general swept through the group.

"Where is he?"

"He broke from us when we were binding his hands and leaped to the creek, but before he could spring from the bank, at this very spot, he was shot dead!"

A groan escaped the young partisan's lips, and Marion's countenance fell.

"He was a young Samson," Lieutenant Wolcott resumed. "He struck Gentian and knocked him sixteen feet by actual measurement. I would have saved him; but Rhodes shot too quick."

"Are you certain that he was killed?" asked Marion.

"Yes; he said nothing, but reeled and fell over the bank just like a dead man would fall."

No other questions fell from the general's lips; the lieutenant's last words seemed to satisfy him, for he commanded a return to the camp.

"I would have saved him," he said to Nick o' the Night, thus quoting from the lieutenant; "but Rhodes's ball has sealed his doom. Good-by, trooper Nettleton."

CHAPTER XI.

BEARDING LIONS IN THEIR DEN.

WHEN the partisans reached the greenwood camp the day was not far distant; but many fell asleep about the smoldering fires, and silence once more reigned in the retreat.

Night was the time when Marion rode to surprise and victory. Like the lion, he remained in his lair during the day, and his troops rested and prepared for the nocturnal forays that have made them famous.

Nick o' the Night did not sleep. The thought of Jotham Nettleton's fate so fresh in his mind, kept the somnolent god aloof, and he paced up and down before sleeping Marion like a faithful sentinel.

To the chief he had related the incidents which had followed Lancaster Wingdon's moonlit shot. His trusty horse had borne him unexpectedly into one of Sumter's bivouacs, where the partisan chief lifted him breathless and faint from the blood-stained saddle. The wound was pronounced fatal at the first examination, but the gallant boy showed such vigor that the patriot surgeon did not despair. The recovery, at first slow, was none the less certain. Strong men and kind-hearted watched the wounded youth, and Sumter soon had the pleasure of seeing him on his feet.

There was rejoicing in the "rebel" camp when the young partisan began to walk without assistance, and when he rode forth to rejoin Marion in the wood, many a "God speed you" followed him.

Lancaster Wingdon had fired too high. The ball striking two inches lower would have stilled his rival's heart.

At the time of Nick o' the Night's return to Marion's camp, Helen Latimer was, as the reader knows, an inmate of Fort Dorchester. The youth was not aware of this, for her incarceration was effected while he was convalescing in the midst of Sumter's command, and Corporal Nettleton did not choose to tell him.

But he was soon to learn that she was not at Azalea, and in a manner that resulted in a perilous adventure characteristic of the fiery spirit which he possessed.

Marion's command had for some time been idle. The British, not thoroughly recovered from the capture of Colonel Holly, refused to venture far from cover, and the patriots were talking of marching north to join Greene, who was about to give Rawdon battle.

The young partisan's soul thirsted for excitement, as he had fully recovered from his wound, and he very naturally turned his attention to Lancaster Wingdon, the young Tory, whose shot had almost terminated his existence.

But first he must see Helen Latimer; she must know that he still drew a sword for liberty, and one evening he stole from the greenwood camp unattended, and rode in the direction of Azalea.

The old house looked dark and gloomy in the weird light of the stars, and the youth found the post-office in the oak devoid of single scrap of paper. Over the scene rested the stillness of the grave; there was no light in the window, where often Helen had placed a signal that communicated important intelligence, and Hugh Latimer's library looked dark and forbidding.

This unnatural aspect puzzled the young free trooper; but after a while he found himself rapping at the low door of a small cabin, which was the last of a line of such structures to the left of the house.

The negro-quarters!

Presently the voice of a negro from within reached the visitor's ears, and the door opened cautiously and snarl-like.

"Golly! who 'sturbin' a darkey dis time o' night?" was the inquiry that greeted the boy.

"Me, Nero. I want to ask you about your little mistress."

A cry of recognition, fortunately not loud, followed

the partisan's speech, and the door opened far enough to admit of the egress of a sable giant.

"Golly mighty! dat you, Massa Nick? Why dey gone say dat you war dead—dat you neber come back to hunt Missus Helen, who am de best angel in Souf Carolina."

"Hunt up Miss Helen, Nero?" cried Nick o' the Night. "What do you mean? Where is your mistress?"

"Dat am de question what troubles dis chile. You see, Massa Nick, dat she am gone—been done gone dese three weeks. Ride off one day with Massa Hugh, and nobody know whar she am—bress her sweet eyes! I tell you, massa," and the slave came nearer and put his hand on the boy's hip with an air of confidence, "I'se one ob dem niggers what hab an opinion. That high-flung young fellah, Massa Wingdon, been comin' to de plantation, an' him an' Massa Hugh been talkin' late o' nights in de library. He knows whar Missus Helen is, an' he am de operatist in de case. Dat am de pinion ob dis cussed chile, an' that be oder niggers on de plantation what coincides."

Nick o' the Night heard the slave through without an interruption. At the mention of his rival's name he gritted his teeth, and cast an involuntary look over his shoulder toward the Tory estate.

"In what direction did Hugh Latimer and Helen ride?"

"To'ds de fort—Fort Do'chestah."

A flush of indignation swept over the young horseman's face.

"When was the young Tory here?"

"Him an' his father an' Massa Hugh had a long talk in de library last night. Dey didn't separate till de niggers was in de cabins, but dis chile watched 'em ride away."

Nick o' the Night straightened himself in the saddle.

"Don't say that I was here, Nero," he said to the darkey. "Keep your eyes open, and send word to the camps when you have anything important to communicate."

"De Lord willin', dis chile will stand by de cause," said Nero. "Is you gwine to Do'chestah?"

"No."

The head of Santee was turned toward the south. "Gwine to Massa Wingdon's house?" inquired the inquisitive black.

"Yes. Good-by, Nero; watch! let eternal vigilance be the price of liberty."

The next moment the horse galloped off, and the negro was looking after him with eyes full of amazement.

"Golly! dat boy gwine to Wingdon, whar Massa Hugh am at dis blessed minnit? Dar'll be de debbil to pay if he meet de Tories on dere own grounds. Isn't dis chile glad dat he isn't de boy what every redcoat and Tory jacket in Souf Carolina is huntin'?"

With this reflection Nero, the patriot darkey, retreated into the cabin and shut the door.

Nicholas Brandon told the truth when he assured the negro that the Tory home was his destination. When he left Marion's camp Azalea was the objective point; but balked in the outset of his expedition—having failed to meet Helen Latimer—it was with flashing eyes and quivering lips that he guided his horse toward the well-known home of the Wingdons.

Lancaster, the son, was there, and from him he would wring the whereabouts of the patriot girl. Perhaps he would take vengeance for the moonlight shot.

The two plantations were not far apart, and the night-riders soon drew rein in the grove that graced the front of the Wingdon home.

Leaving Santee and his canine companion among the trees, he approached the building, in an upper window of which shone a light.

"That is the library of the younger Wingdon—the young Tory's nest," said the boy in a whisper, and a moment later he found himself in the spacious and darkened hall.

Not unknown to the young intruder was the interior of the Tory mansion. He lifted his sword as he climbed the stairs without noise, and pushed down a long corridor toward a light that seemed to shine through a keyhole.

At length he stood before the door in a listening attitude.

A sound like the voice of a person reading in the room beyond the closed portal fell upon his ears, and he touched the bronzed knob with a motion of eagerness.

The next instant he had opened the door, and was standing close to face with three persons!

Hugh Latimer, Essex Wingdon and his Hotspurson!

Each, upon the opening of the portal, had leaped to his feet, and was staring at the unexpected intruder.

The terrible silence that reigned—for silence at such moments is terrible—was broken by the ring of swords.

"We have you now!" cried the younger Wingdon, coming forward as the young partisan's saber flashed from its scabbard. "You did not expect to run into such a nest of loyalists. I heard yesterday that my bullet failed to do its work; but the swords of the king will not forget their cunning. Stand back! I am a match for the young rebel imp who has sought to die in this abode of loyalty."

The young Hotspur's last words were addressed to his father and Hugh Latimer, who were crowding forward with naked weapons, and looks of hate not unmixed with triumph.

"One at a time—or three if you like!" cried the patriotic youth. "I am here to fight!"

There was the meeting of sword and saber, and the impetuosity that burned in Lancaster Wingdon's

breast forced the calmer boy from the room and into the hall.

He proved himself an expert with the cavalry-man's favorite weapon, while the young Tory, who was a good fencer, displayed much skill with the sword that rung like a genuine Damascus blade.

Thrust and parry, parry, thrust and blow.

Essex Wingdon held the lamp above his head, and thus lit up the hall that resounded with the noise of the well-contested field.

But at last a blow from the partisan's saber sent his enemy's weapon from his grasp, and the next moment the young Tory's left arm fell limp at his side—cut through—through sinews, arteries and bone!

A cry of pain followed the sudden blow; the wounded youth sunk to the floor, and the victor, with no time for self-congratulations, found himself retreating before the swords of the remaining Tories.

The blows came thick and fast—mad, impetuous blows. They showed that Tory blood was hot as boiling water.

Down the stair, with his face to the foe, the young partisan retreated—yielding ground inch by inch.

Escape was now his object. He could not reach the bodies of his antagonists, but he could parry their impetuous onslaughts, and he heard their pantings and fierce oaths.

Still down the stairs he went, nearer safety, and unhurt.

All at once he heard a wild cry that was an oath. Looking up, almost directly overhead, he described Lancaster Wingdon leaning over the banisters.

There was a ghastly object in his uplifted hand—something pale and dripping with blood. It looked like an arm; it was an arm—the member lately severed by the saber!

Such a sight appalled the boy. It was enough to thicken the blood of the stoutest man.

Lancaster Wingdon himself looked like a maniac.

The spectacle had drawn the eyes of the two Tories from their antagonist, his from them.

The horrible tableau was abruptly broken before it had lasted half a minute.

Nick o' the Night saw the uplifted hand descend, and the young Tory's bleeding arm came down upon him like a thunderbolt. He tried to dodge the terrible missile, but in vain.

It struck him full in the face, and dashed him to the bottom of the stairs!

Slightly stunned, and fortunately but little bruised, Nick o' the Night sprang to his feet and pushed aside the door. As he did so he heard a cry from above.

Lancaster Wingdon had fainted from sheer pain!

The victor lost no time. He leaped from the house and gained his horse. Springing into the saddle, he struck Santee with the spurs and rode away as if a squadron of demons was at his heels.

There was blood on his face, but not his own. It was the warm blood of Lancaster Wingdon, the young Tory.

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING ABDUCTION.

WHILE Nick o' the Night was riding from the Tory mansion and trying to shut from his sight the terrible termination of the combat on the stairs, Essex Wingdon, mounted on the fleetest horse in his stables, was hurrying toward Dorchester.

Hugh Latimer, who possessed some knowledge of surgery, had stanched the flow of blood from the young Tory's severed member—his good left arm; but the presence of a surgeon was needed at Wingdon Hall. The father, fearful that his impetuous son might die, did not spare his horse, which, reeking with foam and sweat, bore him into the British fort.

Colonel King was roused from a sound sleep by the Tory's hasty raps, and in turn roused the post surgeon. In a few words, Essex Wingdon narrated the story of the bloody battle in his own house.

"Are you certain it was that devilish boy?" asked King.

"I am. He is the only boy in America who would befriend the Wingdon lion in his den!" was the reply.

"Then he is not dead?"

"Dead! I should say that he is animated by the most daring spirit I have ever heard of."

The Tory could not withhold praise from his most inveterate enemy.

"We must catch him!" said the surgeon, with determination.

"Or kill him. A determined fellow is now on his track—a trooper, animated by private revenge. Jo-tham Nettleton will not spare him."

Essex Wingdon swore at the mention of the trooper's name.

"And I will kill trooper Nettleton if he ever crosses my path!" he said. "The other night, disguised as a partisan, he caught my son, and tying him to a tree, whipped him unmercifully. A man of such miserable revenges is not fit to live—much less to be a British soldier."

"Are you certain it was Nettleton?"

"Certain? Did not my boy find at the foot of the tree a card, bearing his name?—his card, beyond all doubt."

King was silent for a moment.

"I'll have him court-martialed when he returns to the command!" he said.

"And after the trial I will kill him. A Wingdon whipped like a dog—whipped with birches like a criminal at the whipping-post! The thought thickens my blood of fifty years. I will wipe out the indignity with the life of the red-coated coward who did the injury!"

The Tory was burning with passion. Proud of his name, he felt deeply insulted, and it was a relief to

the commandant when the surgeon admonished him that his son required immediate surgical aid.

Bidding King a hasty good-night, the Tory rode from Dorchester, and guided the army Esculapius to the bedside of his son.

"A terrible cut," said the surgeon, looking up from his diagnosis. "A strong constitution may bring the young man through."

Though the opinion was delivered in a whisper, it had not escaped the keen ears of the patient.

"It will bring me through!" he said, determinedly. "I will not die! My right arm shall prove a thunderbolt of vengeance to two persons!"

Exhausted by the few words that overstrained his nervous system, the young Tory fell back in a swoon, and the surgeon smiled at the two men who stood by the couch.

"He has backbone!" he said. "I've known a desire for vengeance to perform miracles in surgery."

The loss of blood was against the youth's recovery, and to add to his misfortune, the arm was reamputated by the surgeon at a place nearer the shoulder.

After that he fell into a sound sleep.

The day that followed the battle at Wingdon Hall was the Sabbath.

It was one of those April days that have wedged many people to the Palmetto State—calm, warm, and beautiful. The magnolias and oaks were alive with birds, as it were, and the streams glittered like rivers of gold in the dazzling rays of the sun. All nature seemed to know that it was the Lord's Day—a day of worship and thanksgiving.

One would not have thought that war cursed the sunny glades and uplands of the Ashley—that, somewhere in the State, partisan chased British dragoon, and vice versa. The war which had languished for awhile was assuming new life—the forces of royalty and freedom were about to fight the battle of Hobkirk's Hill, and Marion and Sumter, emboldened by recent successes, were daily becoming more troublesome to the foe.

The afternoon of this lovely Sabbath had reached its meridian, when several persons, mounted on horses, rode from Dorchester and betook themselves to the north.

The little party consisted of Helen Latimer, a British officer, whose insignia of rank proclaimed him a captain, and a young negro boy, evidently the girl's servant.

For a goodly number of days Helen Latimer had been an involuntary prisoner in the old fort. Through her father she had received messages from Bertha, at Azalea, and to her she had sent a number of letters by the very man who rode at her side—Captain Clayton.

The reader has already met this soldier of the royal army. He will recollect that it was he who stepped between Colonel Holly and our heroine in the parlors at Azalea, on the night of that officer's surprise by Marion.

The captain was on a parole of honor—having agreed not to fight against any person who bore arms for the patriot cause, until regularly exchanged. He was a cultivated soldier, who at heart abhorred the war which raged in America, and I think I may say, with truth, that his secret sympathies were with the patriots.

A young and handsome officer, a jovial companion, and Bertha Latimer's lover.

Such a man was Captain Graycliffe Clayton. Helen Latimer was in a merry mood when she left Dorchester, and she did not seem a person who was a prisoner beneath the flag which had waved over America so long.

The destination of the party was soon made manifest by the appearance of an old church which stood in the midst of a grove about three miles from the fort.

"I trust we shall not be late, captain," Helen said.

"Not too late to miss the good benediction," was the smiling reply. "Your father will not attend today?"

"He is no doubt at Wingdon Hall, watching over young Mr. Wingdon with his father. I shudder when I think of that terrible blow. Who ever dreamed that a youth, with but a single arm, should make love to me?"

There was a twinkle in Helen Latimer's blue eyes, and the captain permitted a light laugh to ripple over his lips.

"Not I, Miss Helen," he said. "But you have not visited him since his defeat?"

"I am the colonel's prisoner; but a favorite one, I fear," the girl replied. "If papa knew that he permitted me to attend divine service so far from the fort, there would be a battle of words between the pair, and I might soon find myself in the custody of Colonel Balfour at Charleston. Colonel King is very kind."

"A good soldier whose discipline will not stand against a pair of blue eyes," said the captain, in a roguish tone. "But, seriously, Miss Helen, would you mar the confidence that the colonel places in you?"

"Where is the prisoner-of-war who would not escape, were a good chance offered? I am a rebel! my heart is with the cause for which Marion, Sumter and Greene fight like Switzers. Stand still, captain, and give me a start. I warrant that I would take you into the Swamp Fox's den. I did not plead for this liberty! you asked me if I would listen to a Tory's sermon, and I consented. We rebels need watching, ha! ha! ha!"

Her bright eyes glistened, while she laughed till the grove about them rang with a thousand echoes.

"I think you need no watching," Captain Clayton replied. "Rest assured that I would not chase you into Marion's retreat at any rate. The Swamp Fox is a brave fellow, but I do not wish to cultivate his acquaintance."

"You have met him, I believe," said Helen, sarcastically referring to the nocturnal surprise at Azalea.

The captain's cheeks flushed, and he bit his lips at a loss for a reply to the cutting taunt, smilingly delivered.

A few moments later the trio dismounted near the door of the church.

It was an antique structure, built with brick brought from England by wealthy emigrants. It was not lofty, but commodious, with great doors, and old-fashioned windows. There was undue space before the pulpit, on either side of which was a tablet containing pointed scriptural truths. Now a few stones mark the site of this olden place of worship, and the stirring events of the Revolution that transpired around it have passed from the memory of man.

It was into this sanctuary that Captain Clayton conducted Helen Latimer.

The entree created a furore among the members of the congregation, and the minister bowed to the pair and pointed to a seat directly before the altar.

It was not Helen's first visit to the church. Before the war she had attended services there with her father; but when the pastor drew sword for freedom, the Tory's attendance ceased, and was not resumed until another minister, a man who, protected by the adherents of the royal cause, preached confusion to King George's enemies.

The sermon interrupted by our heroine's arrival was soon resumed. The discourse, while it was strongly loyal, amused the girl, and she gave it her entire attention, when she was not glancing at her escort to see how he was enjoying it.

The parson grew warm as he proceeded; but in the midst of an outburst of ministerial eloquence, he stopped, grew pale and started back with eyes staring at the door.

Instantly a strange cry rung throughout the church, and all eyes were fixed on the entrance where the object of the parson's sudden fright had appeared.

A horse and his rider had entered the house of worship, and in the latter's hand was a pistol!

"Silence!" cried the person in the saddle. "I will slay the first person who offers to touch a weapon."

The next moment the horse moved forward, and wheeled suddenly before the altar.

"Come here, Helen!" said the intruder, addressing the patriot girl in whose eyes there suddenly gleamed a look of recognition.

She started from Captain Clayton's side, and the rider leaning forward, lifted her from the floor!

All this was the work of a moment, and the spectators, too amazed to stir, looked on like people in a trance.

"Freedom claims its own!" cried the intruder, in triumph, as his eye swept the groups of pallid faces. "I am Nick o' the Night, and my mission hither is accomplished. I have robbed a Tory nest of a stolen dove!"

The last words still quivered the speaker's lips, when his horse started toward the entrance. But he did not leave the altar's court before saluting the astonished Clayton, and glancing at the minister, who was peeping over the pulpit, behind which he had slunk for protection!

He bent his body as Santee passed from the church, and a moment later was in the grove, with the prize of his sudden dash!

"The altar of Jehovah has been profaned!" shouted the Tory pastor, leaping from his place of concealment as Santee's black tail disappeared through the door. "Rouse! you men, and follow the villain! He is the scourge of this district. The Lord will assist us in the chase. He will strengthen the limbs of our animals. Captain Clayton, of the royal army, lead these gallant men after the robber."

But the captain shook his head as he rose to his feet.

"I am on a parole of honor!" he said. "Were I free to pursue, I would not prick a rowel. That young imp deserves success for the boldness of his deed."

The minister gave the captain a look of mingled contempt and scorn, and then his eye swept over the congregation, in mute appeal for sympathy.

He found but little, for when his flock recovered their equilibrium, they rushed from the church, expecting that a partisan band had taken their horses.

But the steeds were safe, Helen's alone being missing.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH MARION'S MEN SAY "NO!"

THE successful abduction of the patriot girl from the midst of the Tory congregation, created much excitement throughout the neighborhood of its commission. It was one of the boldest acts of the day, and occurring as it did on the heels of the battle in the corridors of Wingdon Hall, it threw much additional notoriety and hatred upon the head of the young partisan.

Captain Clayton reported the abduction to Colonel King before that eventful Sabbath had drawn to a close, and the frown that came to the commandant's face lingered there despite the good-natured captain's laugh over his own discomfiture.

"It is no joke with me!" cried the irate colonel, his cheeks flushed with rage. "The girl was under my charge—placed there as the king's enemy—a rebel spy, you may say—by her father, the stanchest loyalist in these parts. My honor was security for her safe-keeping—it was the honor of a British soldier, who never broke his word. Lord Rawdon knew that the girl was in my power, and his last dispatches commanded me to keep her. Captain Clayton, I ought to order you to report to Balfour."

"And I might retaliate by referring your leniency to his lordship."

The colonel looked at his subordinate, in whose power he found himself, and forced a smile upon his lips.

"The girl must be retaken," he said. "Captain, we will not quarrel about each other's faults. Our loyal friend must be officially informed of his daughter's abduction. Will you not volunteer to be the bearer of my dispatches?"

"With pleasure," answered Clayton, with a promptness that surprised his commandant. "I wish to see the fair Bertha, and will break the startling tidings to her father."

So it was arranged that the jovial captain should inform Hugh Latimer of Helen's escape from captivity, and quite early on the following day he left Dorchester for the plantation.

He reached Azalea without accident, and was received with much condescension by its inmates.

To the Tory's inquiries about Helen, the captain replied by delivering Colonel King's message, over which the face of the recipient grew red and white by turns.

His rage was almost ungovernable, and the messenger at one time involuntarily shrank from him, and his hand moved toward the hilt of his sword.

But when the captain explained the abduction, when he said that no soldier should violate his parole in the slightest particular, the Tory turned his attention to Colonel King, whom he berated roundly in language more expressive than elegant. So terribly did he abuse the commandant at Dorchester, that Bertha, who was present at the interview, turned her back upon him, and covered her ears with her delicate hands in order to keep out the Niagara of invectives.

There was a smile on Clayton's face during the Tory's abuse of his colonel, and he almost wished that King could have entered the parlor in the midst of it. There would have been bloodshed, for the colonel was no less impetuous than the Tory.

All at once Hugh Latimer ceased his ravings and changed his tone.

"Do you know where Marion is?" he asked the captain.

"No, but I could find him."

"To-day?"

"Or to-night."

"Good! Bertha, bring your writing-desk to me immediately. I will see if this Swamp Fox will sanction such acts as that performed yesterday."

The girl left the room and soon returned, bearing a tiny *secretaire* which she placed on the table.

"A letter from loyalist to rebel on *billet-doux* paper," said the Tory, as, with a smile at the captain, he seated himself at the table. "Strange paper for correspondence in war times; but Marion is just gallant enough to respect such a letter."

Then the Tory fell to writing, and while his quill glided rapidly over the sheet, Bertha and the captain carried on a low conversation at a window on the further side of the room.

In a short time Hugh Latimer's voice interrupted the *ete-a-tete*, and the pair turned to him.

"There! I have written to that troublesome will-o'-the-wisp. Captain, do me a favor by reading my letter."

The British officer approached the table and read the following epistle which the Tory put into his hands:

"AZALEA, Apr. —, 1781.

"TO GENERAL FRANCIS MARION:

"MY DEAR SIR:—It is with regret that I have to report and complain of a dastardly outrage committed by a person belonging to your command. Yesterday afternoon my youngest daughter, Helen, was forcibly taken from a church where she was worshipping, by a boy who has won, by questionable bravery, the *sobriquet* of Nick o' the Night. He is well known to you, and it is to your camp that he has forcibly borne my child. Therefore, general, I trust you will repudiate such brigandish warfare by delivering my daughter to my bosom. The bearer of this communication will reconduct Helen home. I sincerely hope that you will not sanction the abduction of women from the very altar of Jehovah. The high respect which I, though your foe, entertain for you, leads me to hope that my child will be restored without bloodshed. Should you refuse to entertain my request, I shall at once inaugurate certain actions which might result disastrously to your command, and accomplish my desires concerning my child. With respect I have the honor to be, general,

"Your obedient servant,

"HUGH LATIMER."

When Captain Clayton finished reading the communication, he looked at its author, who had watched him closely.

"Well?" said Latimer.

"I think Marion will pay no attention to this!" answered the officer.

"But the threat—the broad hint of vengeance at the foot of the letter," cried Hugh Latimer, flushing visibly and mad in an instant.

"What does Francis Marion care for threats? Not that!" and the speaker snapped his fingers in the Tory's face. "I fancy that your letter would be greeted with a loud guffaw in the rebel camp. I am speaking in earnest, my dear Latimer."

"And I am in earnest when I swear that Francis Marion shall read this letter if I have to thrust it into his face."

"No! no! no!" cried Bertha, whose dread of the Swamp Fox approached the superstitions. "You shall not deliver the letter. Why, Marion would string you up for your impudence. I will seek the man, and my hands will give him the communication."

Captain Clayton glanced at the girl and saw that she was speaking in earnest.

The next moment, with the gallantry that had characterized his soldier life, from its inception, he offered himself as the messenger, and was immediately accepted by the Tory. Bertha demurred at this, but when the captain assured her that his parole would protect him, she acquiesced in the arrangement, and saw him hide the epistle in an inner pocket.

It was in the afternoon when Graycliffe Clayton left Azalea with the letter committed to his care by Hugh Latimer—the letter which the Tory confidently thought that Francis Marion would respect.

The present whereabouts of the dashing partisan officer were not known, and the captain hoped to encounter some members of his band at the approach of night. Such an encounter was his only hope of success, and when the sun went down he found himself near several large brakes, not far from the banks of the Ashley.

All at once while the messenger was thinking about the probable failure of his mission, he heard the tramp of a squadron of horse, and presently saw a troop advancing toward him over the road which he was traversing. His resolve to halt the body was formed in the twinkling of an eye, and a minute later he made six and thirty men draw rein by uttering the word "halt!" He saw swords flash from their scabbards, and a score of carbines were leveled at his breast.

"I seek Francis Marion, for whom I have a message," the captain said, and while the last word still quivered his lips a little man rode from the troop and touched his chapeau politely.

"Marion at your service," he said. "The message."

Captain Clayton produced the Tory's letter, and a moment later a sergeant's tinder-box improvised a light.

A murmur of surprise ran through the troop when the light revealed the messenger's uniform, and all eyes were fixed on Marion, who was perusing the epistle.

All at once the little Huguenot looked up at the captain.

"Was this epistle written in good faith?" he asked, with a doubtful smile on his dark face.

"It was. I saw it written," the captain replied.

"My men shall answer it." The Swamp Fox, turning in his saddle, said in a loud voice:

"Patriots, Hugh Latimer, the Tory, demands the restoration of Helen to Azalea. His messenger is here, and he shall bear your decision to the plantation. What do you say? Shall I command the girl's return?"

A second's silence did not follow the last sentence.

A loud and determined "No" was the reply. Thirty-five troopers had spoken as one man, and five-and-thirty swords were ready to fight for Helen Latimer!

"Marion's men sometimes speak for Marion," the Swamp Fox said to the British captain. "I do not make war on women. Helen Latimer, as she is called, is one of us, and the deed performed in the church was but the rescue of a prisoner from the enemy. I like the old Tory's threats; they promise to give me something to do. Deliver him the message my men have spoken, and tell him that two-score of swords glitter between him and the fair creature whom he calls child."

Captain Clayton was a man of few words when on duty. He drew his steed from the center of the road and saluted the partisan.

Marion returned the salute, the light was extinguished, and six-and-thirty horses galloped away.

"Just as I expected!" said the messenger, with a decided tinge of humor in his tone. "Those fellows will fight to the death for that girl. By my troth! I almost wish that I was leader of that heroic band. Mr. Hugh Latimer, you misjudged your man. There'll be a thunder-storm at Azalea when I return."

With a laugh the captain rode away.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUGH LATIMER'S LAST VISITOR.

A TERRIBLE outburst of passion followed Graycliffe Clayton's return to Azalea. The Tory shook with rage upon the receipt of Marion's reply to his letter, and he vowed that the partisan chief would live to regret his action.

He (the Tory) rode with the captain to Dorchester, where he had an interview with the commandant. At this interview Hugh Latimer's wrath did not get the better of him, for he kept it under control, and was careful not to accuse the lofty officer of a breach of trust. He wanted Colonel King to spare no pains to effect Helen's return, and the soldier promised to do all in his power to bring about the mutually desired ends.

Satisfied that he had a firm ally in the commandant at Dorchester, Hugh Latimer returned to Azalea somewhat buoyant in spirits, but still passionate. Servants kept aloof, and Bertha, at the sound of his oaths in the house, fled to her chamber. He was a terrible man in his moods, and the trembling girl feared that anger would dethrone his reason.

But the days passed with occasional outbursts of madness. No tidings came from Helen, who all believed was secure in one of Marion's retreats, and Hugh Latimer began to curse anew the tardiness of Colonel King.

The battle of Hobkirk's Hill had been fought, and the Tory's heart beat high with exultation. Greene had been defeated, and was retreating before a superior force of the enemy. The patriot cause in the

Carolinas was again under a cloud, and Balfour was sparing several strong detachments from Charleston for the purpose of crushing Marion and Sumter, the latter who had won the *sobriquet* of the "Game Cock of South Carolina."

The young reader may suppose that the partisan chieftains held many secret consultations. They met at dead of night in the center of rivers, on the edge of thickets and brakes, and in the midst of the dark forest the sleeping birds were roused by the strong and earnest voice of Thomas Sumter. The darkest days for the Palmetto State were trying the souls of her sons, and the cause of the king was brightening beneath her mellow skies.

Hugh Latimer was the sole occupant of his library one night; the old clock—a ponderous "wall sweeper"—was ticking away behind him while he sat at a table littered with manuscripts and long, official-looking documents.

The Tory's face wore a painful expression, as he unfolded various parchments, over which he glanced scrutinizingly before he laid them aside. The head at his left grew in bulk, and there were but few documents at his right hand.

At last he left the table, and kindled a fire in the antique grate. Then he took the little heap of papers which he had placed at his right hand, and bent over the blaze, momentarily growing bigger. There was a smile of triumph on his face, and it was evident that the destruction of the papers would prove a victory for him.

He was about to consign them to the flames, when he heard his name uttered in a tone that caused him to start like a man stung by an adder.

Clutching the papers in his nervous hands, the Tory sprang to his feet, and, whirling suddenly, confronted the speaker.

This personage was an object of pity—a being from the realms of starvation and rage, a man who looked like a maniac.

He was enough to frighten Hugh Latimer out of his wits, and the Tory exhibited signs of pallor as he gazed in silence on the strange man.

"Good-night, Hugh Latimer!" the man said. "I am an intruder upon the privacy of your sanctum; but I could not keep away. I want those papers in your hand."

With the last words the speaker stepped toward the Tory, who with a cry of amazement shrank involuntarily toward the hearth.

"Your mission is one of robbery, then," said Hugh Latimer. "These papers in my hand are not valuable to you; they are private property, deeds to an old estate in the mother country. You can't have them!"

"Can't? Do you know who I am?"

"No! I care less."

The Tory was getting bold.

"I've been here before," the visitor said. "Do you not recollect the young corporal who rode with Colonel Holly to this place—the young corporal whom you admitted bore a striking resemblance to your daughter Helen? Ah! I see that you have not forgotten. I am that man! I am Jotham Nettleton!"

"You? Where's your uniform?"

"At the fort. These clothes illy become a man who has charged with Tarleton into the enemy's ranks. I do not look like the handsomest dragoon in the 41st Royal Horse. I have been through the shadows of death. I rode into Marion's camp. He discovered me, and a squad of his marauders led me to the gallows-tree. But there I showed a little Nettleton muscle. I escaped, but a ball struck me and I fell over a precipice into the most accursed river in South Carolina. Thank God! I did not die. Wounded and almost dead I crawled beneath the bank and swore to live. How I burrowed there, fearing to venture out lest Marion's men should recapture me, I need not tell you. I did not come hither to shock your ears with the narrative of a soldier's suffering. But I want to tell you something; last night I slept in a thicket, and in a tree, at that."

"In a tree?"

"Beneath me were Marion's men, who took possession of the thicket after I had entered. Your daughter was there."

Hugh Latimer stepped forward excitedly.

"Helen," he cried.

"Yes, Helen. I need not tell you about the conversation that I heard. Hugh Latimer, there is a tattoo on that girl's shoulder—it is a singular device—a crown pierced by an arrow! On my shoulder is the same tattoo. I am Helen's brother!"

The dragoon almost shrieked the last sentence, and before the Tory could draw himself in the grip of the excited man.

Jotham Nettleton's eyes flashed fire and his face was livid.

"She is my sister and you are not her father!" he cried, his hot breath almost scorching Hugh Latimer's cheeks.

The Tory's face grew pale, and he tried to wrench himself from the vise-like grip of the dragoon.

"You are the man for whom I have been looking since my landing on these shores," the trooper continued. "Your name is Hugh Latimer here. Was it that in England? Did the people call you Hugh Latimer, when the good ship *Pict* left London? I remember the treachery practiced on board—the storm, the holes bored in the *Pict*'s bottom, the awful scene of shipwreck and death. I was a boy of six then; my sister Helen a babe in her mother's arms. Mother was washed ashore with Helen clasped to her bosom. The babe reached your hands; the wreckers buried mother. You fled the realm with the charge of crime against you, for, as you know, one of your tools confessed in the hour of death. Those papers are Helen's birthright; they take from you that which you have usurped.

Hugh Latimer, Mortimer Holland, murderer! usurper! liar! give me the papers!"

A Bengal tiger seemed to have hold of the Tory. He was shaken by his visitor till his teeth chattered, till his joints seemed rent apart.

"I have found you! When I knew that the crown and the arrow were on Helen's arm, then I knew that you were the man for whom I have been looking. It was to seek you that I enlisted for the American war. My heart is not in the strife. I love freedom; but I want you—you!"

The Tory's face was the picture of ghastliness and a picture that Jotham Nettleton seemed to enjoy.

"The papers! quick! There are noises below."

The grip grew tighter on the Tory's body, and he relinquished the documents which he had almost cast upon the fire.

"Good!" said the trooper. "Now for my revenge!"

"What! are you going to stain your hands with crime?" gasped Hugh Latimer. "I did not harm your mother. Martha Nettleton died in a storm, and—"

"God sent the storm; but your men sunk the Pict!" cried the trooper.

He fairly hissed the last sentence when with superhuman strength he lifted the Tory from the floor and dashed him against the wall at the foot of which he sunk with a groan.

"There! I hope I've killed you!" grated the avenger. "I have a mind to destroy your accursed dwelling."

The next moment he picked up the lamp and was about to apply its blaze to the papers on the table when he hesitated.

"No!" he said. "This roof has sheltered Helen, and to-night beneath it sleeps one whom she calls sister. I cannot destroy it. I will not deprive her of a shelter. Perhaps, with a glance at his victim, "I have already made her fatherless."

The lamp was restored to the table, and the following minute the library was tenanted by the motionless form of the loyalist.

Jotham Nettleton went down the stairs, and sought the stables. There he saddled and led forth the Tory's favorite horse, which he mounted and rode away.

After he had departed, silence fell on the old house of Azalea.

It was not broken for a long time.

At the end of an hour Hugh Latimer, as we will still call the Tory, moved and sat up. After awhile he managed to reach the table where with trembling hand he traced some words on a bit of yellow paper.

His eyes looked wild and his temple was covered with dark blood.

All at once the quill dropped from his hand, he gave a groan, and a moment later lay across his chair motionless.

One life was finished. The proudest Tory in South Carolina was dead!

CHAPTER XV.

CAUGHT AT LAST.

With the reader's permission we will carry him back to the house of Colonel Isaac Hayne, where, in the second chapter of our story, we first encountered this devoted patriot.

Colonel Hayne yearned for active life. He was under a parole of honor—a parole forced from him by the British commander at Charleston by the employment of arguments that no man could resist. Hayne became the enemy's prisoner, while his wife and children lay dying with the small-pox, and eager to be at their side, he took the oath of allegiance to the king. He was biding his time. He believed that an expulsion of the royal armies from the district would absolve him, and during the fortnight that followed the battle of Hobkirk's Hill, events had taken a favorable turn for the patriots.

But the argus eyes of the British were on the high-minded partisan, and they panted for a pretext under which they could take his noble life.

Isaac Hayne knew this, but he resolved to follow the dictates of his conscience.

The partisan occupied one of the spacious parlors of his residence one night in the early part of May; but not alone.

A youth, burly and strong, and with clear eyes and handsome face, stood beside him at the table, on which lay a rough but accurate map of Dorchester and its surroundings.

The hour was quite late, and the heavy shutters, tightly closed, prevented the light in the room from being seen by persons without the house.

"I will lay your plans before Marion," the patriot's young companion said, folding the map. "More; I will urge their adoption. Sumter meets him at dawn in Camp Secret, and to be present I must needs ride away."

"But the girl? Will you take her with you?"

"No. Her presence here is not suspected, and here she is safest. A camp is not a suitable place for a female of her tender years, and I am content to leave her in the care of such a patriot as Isaac Hayne."

The partisan's eyes partook of the pride that glowed on the youth's face; and with heart too full for utterance, he put forth his hand.

"Hark! a voice!"

The next instant the hands parted, and the occupants of the room turned involuntarily toward the door.

"A loud knocking quickly followed.

"Your picket!" said the youth, looking up into Hayne's face, which had suddenly grown pale.

"He would not knock for he has a signal that he well knows!" was the hasty reply; and the speaker

started toward the corridor that led to the front portals of his home.

The youth—Nick o' the Night—stepped across the parlor, at whose door he paused and listened.

Hayne's face had grown deadly pale by the time that his hand touched the silver knob. He seemed to have a premonition of what was about to come; but he opened the portal like a man brave enough to die.

On the great stone step stood the burly figure of a British dragoon!

"Colonel Hayne?" said the man, executing a faultless military salute.

"Good-night, soldier," was the partisan's reply.

"To whom am I indebted for this visit?"

"To a strong detachment of royal cavalry, commanded by Captain McClintock."

"Are you he?"

"N—no," said the soldier.

"Then, sir, I will address your commander," was the haughty reply, that made the trooper bite his lip and turn from the house.

"Captain, he will talk to you, sir," he said, in a strong voice, and the rattling of a sword was followed by the appearance of a young officer, evidently not long out of his teens.

"I am Captain McClintock," he said to Hayne. "Pardon me for permitting a private to call an American worthy to his door; but the fact is, Colonel Hayne, I have heard such terrible stories about the fellow now in your house, that I concluded to be cautious."

Hayne could not but start at the last sentence.

"To whom do you refer, captain?" he asked.

"To Nick o' the Night!" was the answer, the tone of which proved that the cautious dragoon was getting bolder. "Do not prevaricate, colonel. We want him, not you; although by harboring him you have trampled on your parole of honor. I have the honor to inform you that your mansion is surrounded by my command, that your picket, the little negro, was captured, and that the peaceable surrender of your guest will prevent bloodshed and conflagration. He is here! A denial will only subject you and your house to indignity."

The silence that followed was painful in the extreme.

Nick o' the Night, standing against the lintels of the parlor door, heard every word of the conversation just recorded, and though he could not see Colonel Hayne's face, he felt how pale and ghastly it was.

The flashing of a taper into the hall startled him, and stepping from the door he looked beyond the patriot.

He saw Captain McClintock waiting for a reply to his demand, and a number of British dragoons who faced the house.

All at once he turned and glided down the corridor that ran through the building, thus dividing the lower wings. He reached the rear door, which he opened by means of the key in the lock, and looked out into the night; at first nothing rewarded his action, but dark forms soon became visible between him and the stars, and he heard the low voices of men.

McClintock had spoken the truth! The mansion was surrounded by British soldiers.

The boy's startling discovery was followed by the closing of the door, and as he turned toward the group at the front entrance, he heard the captain's voice.

"Answer me, Colonel Hayne! Shall we have a peaceable surrender, and spare your beautiful home, or must we take your guest by force, and punish you for your stubbornness? I repeat that the boy is here, and we will not depart without him!"

The captain spoke with much spirit, and before the patriot could reply, a figure sprung past him, and alighted on the stone, cried:

"I am here!"

It was Nick o' the Night, and the British officer, with an ejaculation of surprise, started back, and almost fell from the stoop.

"That's the devil!" shouted the dragoon, who, having summoned Hayne to the door, had remained within protecting distance of his superior. "He's the grandest rebel in these parts, and I owe him a blow for the scar on my shoulder."

Nick o' the Night saw the dragoon, whose sword flashed from its scabbard, as he stepped forward, and a pistol leaped from beneath his jacket.

"I'll kill you if you lift your saber!" he said, eying the maddened trooper. "I surrender to Captain McClintock!"

"Yes, he has surrendered, Colby," the young officer said, motioning the saber aside. "My young fellow, you will march forward under the corporal's charge."

With a glance at Hayne, on whose face was a painful expression, Nick o' the Night, who had at last fallen into the hands of his hunters, stepped from the stone.

"Colonel Hayne, we will not molest you," said the officer; "but your conduct must be reported to my superior. I am aware that the most important rebel in these parts has fallen into my hands, and I assure you that I shall carry out, to the last letter, the order lately received in this district from the hands of his lordship."

Hayne gave the captain a look of inquiry, which was almost immediately answered.

"Bring that light nearer," commanded the young officer, and the trooper who held the torch rode toward the group, while the speaker unfolded a document which he had drawn from his bosom.

Nick o' the Night and the South Carolinian watched the young captain with painful attention, while he read the following order in the glare of the torch;

"HEADQUARTERS ROYAL ARMY OF THE SOUTH,
CAMDEN, Apr. 20th, '81."

To COLONEL KING AND SUBORDINATES:

"The troublesome youth termed Nick o' the Night must be shot within fifteen minutes after his capture. By order of RAWDON."

It was an order characteristic of its author. A grave-like silence followed the reading. The troopers looked at their young prisoner, eager to note the effect it had produced, and Colonel Hayne gasped like a man suffocating in a volume of smoke.

"That is a cruel order!" the patriot cried, with indignation in his eye. "Lord Rawdon is selling his nobility for the reputation of a murderer. I protest against the carrying out of his infamous decree!"

"No! no!" suddenly cried the boy. "Better people than me have died for liberty before British guns. I regret that I have but one life to give to my country. Colonel Hayne, see these men obey the Rawdon, and tell Marion how I died!"

The young officer was abashed at such bravery, and bit his lips.

"He is brave," he said, in an undertone, to Hayne; "but I must obey his lordship."

The next moment he turned to his command:

"Execution squad, by the right oblique, march!"

The first twelve troopers that headed the squadron obeyed the command, and halted before the fearless boy!

Hayne shut his eyes and groaned from the depth of the most patriotic bosom in the Palmetto State. The torch, held aloft behind the executioners, threw a vivid light on Nick o' the Night's face, which betrayed no signs of fear.

A moment intervened between the halt and the unslinging of the deadly carbines.

The young officer looked at his watch. He was a soldier who admired his captive's bravery; but who would not let it step between him and military duty.

All at once he gave the command that caused twelve carbines to touch as many shoulders.

But the next moment a figure darted from the house, and the weapons covered the form of a beautiful girl.

It was Helen Latimer—Helen Nettleton, by a dragoon's declaration!

What followed her action?

The troopers—mere military machines—without lifting their heads, waited for the command to fire.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHALLENGE TO FIGHT.

CAPTAIN MCCLINTOCK was in a quandary. He looked from the young maiden who had thrown herself between the carbines and the patriot boy to Isaac Hayne. The South Carolinian stood in his door, and met the officer's gaze.

Then the captain's glance returned to the troopers whose carbines were leveled at the girl. Those stern soldiers of England's regular army were slaves to obedience; they did not question the commands of superior officers, and the youthful captain held Helen's life on his lips. He could have spoken the word "fire," and twelve carbines would have sent their death missiles into her bosom.

But he withheld the terrible command, because he never made war on women, and it is probable that the girl's beauty and heroism helped to keep back the order for which the soldiers waited.

The silence that followed Helen's action was of brief duration.

"Make me your target," she cried, looking at the young captain. "I am a rebel. I have played the spy. I have sent this young patriot on missions that have routed your troopers. By my secret workings Marion has been enabled to fall on the enemy at night, and Sumter has vaulted into the saddle at a word from me. I hate Great Britain as a snake hates the foot that turns from the path to tread upon it. My days and nights have been devoted to the cause of liberty, and to die for her would be a pleasure."

The soldiers heard her words and looked at their leader.

"We want the boy—the rebel imp!" cried a burly sergeant to McClintock. "Captain, the girl must not die. It is the boy that we want. Make him stand out and receive his doom."

"I am here!" said Nick o' the Night, gently pushing Helen aside, and stepping into the glare of the torch.

"No! Nick!"

The next moment she had leaped before him, and her eyes flashed upon the troopers again.

The young partisan again pushed her aside.

"I die!" he cried. "Helen Latimer, live to avenge my death—live to stir Marion's blood till he sweeps this fair district like a besom of destruction—till the last British horsefall crosses the borders of Carolina. Yes, live, and when freedom has been gained plant a flower on the grave of him who sacrificed his life on her altar. I will die here—bravely—like a man!"

He turned from her with an effort, and, with a groan—a cry of despair that reached ears for which it was not intended—the young girl sprung toward Isaac Hayne, with arms stretched out appealingly.

But she did not reach the door. Near the stone her strength deserted her, and she sunk to the ground.

"Now do your duty!" cried Nick o' the Night, turning from the swooning maiden to his appointed executioners.

The captain bit his lips and looked at the twelve.

"Ready!"

The troopers did not move a muscle—they had long been ready.

"Aim!"

Twelve eyes swept along the shining barrels into which the doomed boy looked undaunted.

The next moment was one of suspense; it seemed an eternity of time, but the death-word came at last:

"Fire!"

A loud volley cleaved the balmy air of that May night. Ten saddles suddenly became tenantless, and Captain McClintock, the young leader, fell forward on his horse's neck.

The command which had proved so deadly had not fallen from his lips. It had come from a point behind saddle-tae-squadron, and the lips from which it had fallen were Francis Marion's.

Nick o' the Night stood unharmed on the spot where he had expected to perish by English balls.

"Surrender! every mother's son of you!" shouted the voice that had spoken the word "fire," and before a single trooper could unsling a carbine and turn to meet the foe, the speaker and his men were on the lawn.

"Captain McClintock, do you surrender?" cried Marion, grasping the young officer's arm. "I told the boys to spare you, but a stray bullet, perhaps—"

McClintock did not respond to the partisan chief, and, when the victor raised his head, he saw that the commander of the squadron would never draw a sword again!

The British, taken by surprise, surrendered. They could do naught else, and Marion had won a victory of which he might be proud. He had saved the life of the youngest as well as the bravest partisan in the South—a life which liberty could ill spare.

"We got wind that McClintock was abroad, and so we followed him," Marion said to the young partisan. "You will not have to meet Sumter and me at daybreak, for I will take the map here and consult with the colonel before we ride away."

Thus briefly did Marion relate the story of the opportune rescue, and Helen, having recovered from the swoon, took his hands, and thanked him for the gallant deed.

"I have something to tell you, girl," said the little Huguenot. "Do you know Captain Clayton?"

"The jovial officer whom I deserted in the church?" cried the girl with sparkling eyes. "Ah! general, I could not forget that chivalrous trooper. But what of him?"

"He will never fight for the king again!"

"What! is he dead?"

"No! His heart was never in the war. He rode into our camp last night and declared that he had broken his sword, and sworn allegiance to American liberty."

Helen's eyes flashed with mingled pride and delight.

"He is Bertha's lover, and Bertha's heart is with the royal cause," she said.

"But the captain will win her for all that," said Marion. "Your sister Bertha loves him, and I assure you that she will honor his candor and turn rebel herself."

"Never!" cried Helen. "General, I fear you do not know my sister."

Marion laughed, and was about to turn away to converse with Colonel Hayne, who was waiting for him, when Helen's hand fell upon his arm.

"Have you any more news?" she asked. "I have been cooped up in this old house for a fortnight, and have heard but little about the war."

"We are gaining ground everywhere!" said Marion, with a glow of triumph on his sallow cheeks. "Greene is recovering, Cornwallis is marching to his doom in the North, and God is smiling on the colonies. Dorchester will soon be ours. The crippled bird has left Wingdon Hall—"

"What! is Lancaster Wingdon out?" cried Helen.

"Yes. He is hunting for two men!"

"Two men?"

"That boy and a renegade trooper, named Nettleton."

Helen started at mention of the last name.

"Where is the trooper?" she asked.

"I do not know. He slew your father—I mean Hugh Latimer," replied Marion. "Nicholas has doubtless told you about the writing—the last he ever executed—that was found on his table."

"Yes."

"We are hunting for the trooper as well as that one-armed Tory boy. I believe that he carries papers that concern you, Helen. If he meets Lancaster Wingdon one or both will die. If Nicholas and the young Tory have a recontre blood will flow."

Marion turned almost abruptly from the young girl and stepped to Hayne's side.

Helen was then joined by Nick o' the Night, and the twain were engaged in an earnest conversation when a young negro wormed his way through the partisan band, and handed him a note which was sealed with the waxen crest of Wingdon Hall.

The boy started when the sign met his eye, and Helen watched him with intense curiosity as he stepped toward a torch and broke the seal.

The chirography that met his gaze was elegant and femininsh in shading, and in the glow of the torch the young partisan read:

"NICHOLAS BRANDON—Bandit! Are we never to meet that we may settle forever the accounts that we owe one another? Like a coward, you fly from before me now that I am strong again. My negro will give you this, and know by its deliverance that every night at twelve I wait for you at the double oaks near Wingdon Hall. I dare you to meet me there alone, and in this challenge, I brand you coward! bandit! and murderer! Carolina is too small for you and LANCASTER WINGDON,

"Of Wingdon Hall."

The reader gritted his teeth when he read the trio of epithets that the challenge contained; but when

the last sentence was mastered, a smile overspread his face.

"That is true, Lancaster Wingdon, that is true!" were the words that rippled over his lips, and folding the paper he returned to Helen.

"I am going away," he said in a tone which did not rouse her suspicions. "The negro's message is important."

He took her hands, and, unseen by the men about them, snatched a hurried kiss from her lips.

"Come!" he said to the sable messenger. "Is he there?"

"He am, massa!" was the reply.

A few moments later the young partisan, mounted on his horse and followed by Whig, the gallant dog, called Marion, from his council with Hayne and several trusted lieutenants.

"Good-by, general," said the boy, putting out a hand which Marion took with great surprise. "If I am not in your camp at daybreak you will find me beneath the double oaks near Wingdon Hall. Send no one after me, as you value the tried friendship of Nick o' the Night."

Marion wrung the boy's hand, and gave him a look that seemed to fathom the secret of his sudden departure.

The next moment the twain had separated, and the young partisan and the Wingdon slave were riding away.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIGHT AT THE DOUBLE OAKS.

About the hour of Nick o' the Night's departure from Marion and his band in company with the negro who had delivered the challenge, a solitary person rode from Wingdon Hall. The night was calm and the mellow rays of a lofty moon fell alike on horse and rider. The latter sat proudly in the rich saddle, and the dark eyes above the pallid cheeks were full of fire. An empty sleeve hung mournfully at his left side, and the bridle-rein lay lightly in his only hand. He wore a handsome cavalry saber, and there was a pistol in his belt.

After debouching upon the well-defined road that ran by the great gate, at the foot of the Wingdon estate, the lone horseman guided his steed toward the east, and rode in that direction in a walk. He did not seem in a hurry, for he even relinquished the rein and gave himself up to meditation.

At length the ride terminated, and the night-rider sat in his saddle beneath the boughs of two giant oaks that grew like twins beside the road.

"I am here! Now let him meet me!" he said in a voice tinged with bravado. "If Nero finds him he will come, for I know his mettle. By George, the king! I have tested it."

The speaker was Lancaster Wingdon, and he waited with impatience for the hour of twelve.

We left him last on a bed of pain in the grand old mansion from which he had lately ridden. The reader will readily recall the battle in Wingdon Hall—the fierce conflict that cost the young Tory one of his trusty arms. Long days burdened with pain followed the events of that night, and long nights of restlessness tortured the young loyalist's mind. He had sworn that he would live—live for vengeance, and his determination to conquer death aided in his restoration. He watched his strength return with an impatience which he could not disguise, and when he could wield a saber again he shouted for joy. He practiced with the sword and the saber during his convalescence, his father, a good swordsman, becoming his antagonist in the mimic strife. Day after day the ring of steel resounded throughout Wingdon Hall, and the servants wondered why the crippled master practiced swordsmanship so incessantly.

When Lancaster Wingdon could mount his horse, when, with the reins over the pommel, he could ride through the Wingdon park and strike off limbs with the saber—when he could shoot accurately at full gallop, he penned his challenge and sent his favorite servant upon his enemy's trail.

Night after night he had ridden to the oak, where until midnight he had waited for the coming of the foe. He was inclined to doubt Nero's faithfulness at last; but the colored man was true; he was hunting for the formidable will-o'-the-wisp of the South.

Let us return to the young Tory and the night that witnessed the rescue of our youthful hero from the guns of the English dragoons.

He sat beneath the boughs of the double oaks counting the minutes, and listening intently. The least sound caught his ears, and a smile soon to be dissipated by a profound silence would wreath his lips in satisfaction.

At last there came a sound that could not be misinterpreted.

It was the noise of horses' feet, and the young Tory soon descried two figures advancing from the west. He hastened into the road, as if to bar their progress, for a voice which had fallen upon his ears told him that one of the riders was the slave Nero.

The horsemen continued to approach until, at sight of the immovable figure in the road, they drew rein.

"Massa Lancaster!" exclaimed the negro, frightened at the youth whom he had recognized. "De Lord bless us, dar'l be a battle here, suah!"

The silence of a moment followed the darkey's exclamation.

"I am here, Lancaster Wingdon!" said the white rider beside the slave.

"So am I!"

"The challenge found me in the midst of victory. Marion has overtaken Captain McClintock's detachment, and, with the exception of a few who are dead, its members are prisoners-of-war. You want to fight me. I am ready; but let me tell you that the odds are in my favor. You have but one arm!"

"Which is equal to both of yours!" the young Tory replied, grating his teeth. "I fight with any kind of weapon, and you will discover that I am no mean antagonist. Of course you rode hither to fight me, and it is not necessary to brand you coward, bandit and murderer!"

Nick o' the Night's eyes flashed.

"No! I came hither to resent the insult which none but a Tory can give!" he cried. "Being the challenged party, I select. The weapons shall be the saber; we shall retire eighty rods and charge each other at the same moment. How do you like the plan of battle?"

"It suits me; but it gives you a chance to fly."

The young partisan bit his lip and grew pale beneath the cutting taunt of cowardice.

"When I leave this field it shall be as victor or in death," he said. "Lancaster Wingdon, dismiss your black, and let us seek our charging stations. I want no witness to this, our last battle, save the Great Jehovah!"

A moment later Nero was dismissed, and when he had retired from view the two duelists traversed the road in opposite directions.

At forty rods westward from the tree Nick o' the Night halted and wheeled about, and saw his foe do the same in the distance.

There was a moment's silence when, as it had been agreed, Lancaster Wingdon's voice came down the road:

"Are you ready?"

"Ready!" was the response.

"Then charge!"

Two black horses struck at the same moment by sharp spurs darted forward like great cannon-balls, and the thunder of hoofs floated heavenward to die among the stars.

Closer and closer together they momentarily came, their young riders awaiting the terrible collision with flashing eyes and eager sabers. Lancaster Wingdon had dropped the reins which at the start he gripped with his teeth, and his whole soul was in the fire of the moment. His antagonist sat in the saddle with body slightly bent forward, and a gleaming saber hanging idly as it seemed, at his right side. But his eye was on the foe, and his long hair streaming in the midnight breeze caused him to look like a cavalier of the days of England's Charlie.

Eighty rods are soon traversed by charging horses; the thunder of hoofs was of brief duration, for in less time than I have described the positions and looks of the duelists, they met.

Met in the moonlight just beyond the branches of the double oaks.

A second before the collision Nick o' the Night sent his body backward like the rebound of a rubber ball, and when his saber, aimed at the young Tory's head, descended with terrible force, it met another blade sweeping like a battle-ax toward his own cranium.

The shock was gigantic—like the meeting of two knights in olden tourney. The black horses recoiled on their haunches, and the riders were almost lifted from the saddles by the colliding sabers.

They recovered almost simultaneously.

"Go back to your charging station!" cried Nick o' the Night to his antagonist. "We must fight in this manner until your southern moon shines upon a victory."

The look he received was full of hate and courage.

"I will fight till your sword cleaves my skull, or mine yours!" was the reply, and again the young duelists retreated for the charge.

The sole witness of the duel was the partisan's dog, who stood in the shadow with his eyes on his young master.

"Hark!" cried Nick o' the Night to himself, when for the second time he had taken position. "Some person is coming from the south. He must not interfere in this affair of mine. By my life! it may be Marion!"

Then, almost before the name of his chief had ceased to quiver on his lips, he gave the command for the second charge.

Again the horses sprung forward, and approached each other like arrows. The blood of each seemed tingling in their veins, and their eyes flashed like the eyes of their riders.

Nick o' the Night heard the noise of hoofs in the south. He feared that the unseen person would burst suddenly upon the dueling ground, and directly between him and his foe.

The road that led to the south joined the main one at the double oaks, and the young partisan hoped to meet the Tory beyond that point.

To do this he drove the spurs into Santee's bowels, and leaned forward in his eagerness. Would he pass the mouth of the southern road before the newcomer could dart from it and fling himself between the two horses? He bent his energies to the accomplishment of his desires, but in vain!

All at once a dark object bounded into the dueling road.

It seemed to come from the lowest boughs of the oaks, and in the center of the road it paused and remained there like a mass of iron.

The young patriot uttered a cry of horror. He threw his body erect, spoke to his horse, and flung him back upon his haunches by a powerful jerk at the rein.

Lancaster Wingdon was not so fortunate.

Singular to relate, he had not heard the tread of hoofs in the south; the wind had been against him, and he was not prepared for the sudden appearance of the apparition.

Therefore, he bounded against it with the force of the thunderbolt; he rooted it from its seemingly immovable position, and with it went to the ground with a wild shriek of terror and despair!

It was a terrible collision, and Nick o' the Night's face was deathly white as he witnessed it. His ears had saved him; but he wished that he had passed the road in time and engaged his enemy. He believed that the man borne to the ground by Lancaster Wingdon was Marion himself, who had arrived on the spot for the purpose of putting an end to the duel; and the thought that his chief might be slain was enough to cause him to leap from the saddle and hasten to the dark, struggling mass in the road.

The dog seeing his master's movement darted forward, and with a sharp cry of anger leaped over the prostrate horses and seized, by the shoulder, a man who was trying to rise.

"Whig! Whig! let go your hold!" cried the patriot, seizing the beast's shaggy coat, and tearing him rudely from his victim. "Touch no one here without my command!"

Abashed and sullen the dog slunk away, and from near the horses looked on the scene.

Two riders and their steeds formed a conglomerate mass in the moonlit road, and the patriot recognized the interloper with a strange cry.

"What! you here, Jotham Nettleton?"

"Yes!" was the response, which was followed by a groan. "Isn't it strange that we three enemies should meet here? My horse is dead; he is lying on my leg which is crushed. How is the Tory?"

Nick o' the Night looked from the trooper to his young enemy who lay still in the moonlight, his body half-hidden by the body of his horse, writhing in the pain occasioned by broken limbs.

"I believe he is dead," he said, and with the last word on his lips he approached the youth.

At touch of his hand Lancaster Wingdon did not move, and the patriot's eyes returned to the trooper.

"He is dead!"

"Then we have settled our accounts," and the outlawed dragoon smiled. "But get me out of this, Nick o' the Night. I do not see that we should be enemies now."

"We are not enemies. Have you got the papers?"

"What papers?"

"Those which you took when you killed Hugh Latimer!"

"Yes," he said, after a pause. "They are in my bosom. Since that night I have been an outlaw. Colonel King's men have hunted me, so have Marion's. But I'll soon be free. Nick, I want to see my sister."

The boy extricated Jotham Nettleton, and with great difficulty assisted him to a place on Santee's back. Then he left the tragic spot, and when Nero, trembling with fear, crept from his place of concealment, he found the dew falling on his young master's forehead.

The rivalry that had existed between Nicholas Brandon and the young Tory was ended. The cause of the king had lost another sword.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WITH WHICH OUR STORY ENDS.

"THEY may not come to-night. Are you certain that he said they would reach Azalea before dawn?"

"Quite certain, dearest Bertha. I left Marion's camp two hours since, and Helen was impatient to start."

The twain, Bertha Latimer and Captain Clayton, stood on the porch of the old mansion with anxious faces turned toward the road that ran by it—the road over which Tarleton had often chased Marion, and vice versa. They were alone. The young girl was still arrayed in mourning garments, and her companion wore the plainest undress uniform allowed in the British army. She looked strangely at him while he spoke, and then said in a low tone:

"So you have really left the service, Graycliffe?"

"Yes, Bertha; these Americans are fighting for freedom; their wrongs and their gallantry have won my heart. I have been to their camp. They fight not for money; their food is coarse, the earth their pillow. Such men make the best patriots beneath the sun. I can not fight against them. My resignation is written; it will be accepted. Let the king's men call me poltroon, traitor, if they like! but so long as I live I will never bedraw my sword against liberty in any land."

Despite her monarchical proclivities, Bertha Latimer's face glowed with enthusiasm, while he uttered his declaration, and when the last had fallen from his lips she gently touched his arm.

"I shall be the last to speak against your change of heart," she said. "Graycliffe, though I love the king's cause, I do not love you the less for deserting it. If the Americans succeed in this struggle, we shall not suffer. God will bless us under Washington's banner, as he has under the flag of Saint George."

Captain Clayton was about to reply when the tramp of a squadron fell upon his ears.

"Hark! they come!" he exclaimed, looking at Bertha.

"Helen, my sister, at last!"

A moment later the clinking of sabers was plainly heard, and a troop of cavalry drew rein before the mansion.

Bertha Latimer darted from the captain's side, and embraced a young girl whom the leader of the troops assisted from the saddle.

It was Helen.

Once more the old mansion stood before her; but he whom she had long called father was not present to greet her return.

Perhaps it was well that he had been called to his account, for the papers that Helen carried in her bosom—the papers taken by Jotham Nettleton from Azalea on the night of the master's murder—told her that he was a criminal. The great crime of Hugh Latimer's life was committed in the mother country.

He wanted property, and after many base intrigues, sent a young widow and two children to sea. He sent villains off in the same vessel. They did their work. In the midst of a storm they scuttled the vessel—the Pict. The mother perished; but the children lived. The girl fell into Hugh Latimer's hands; so did many thousands of pounds. The child was Helen—not Helen Latimer, but Helen Nettleton! He fled with his ill-gotten wealth to Carolina, where he lived in ease, raising Helen beside his own daughter, Bertha, as her sister. The widow's son also escaped the storm and the sailors' villainy. He grew to manhood, with a crown and an arrow, the crest of his house, in tattoo on his shoulder. He came to America in the king's service, and the reader has followed him through the thrilling scenes of our romance.

The papers taken from Azalea told the story of Helen's birth, and condemned Hugh Latimer.

Jotham Nettleton did not ride to the old mansion with his long-lost sister. As the reader has seen, he was borne by Nick o' the Night from the dueling-ground. He reached Marion's camp, where, in the arms of the beautiful girl, so long separated from him, he breathed his warlike life away.

Marion's men made his grave, and a devout partisan—for in those days men prayed as well as fought—prayed for the eternal repose of the dragoon's soul.

Helen's welcome to Azalea was cordial. The slaves were delighted to see the "young missus" again, and Marion and his men did not ride away until they had feasted at the tables where Cornwallis and Rawdon had drunk to the success of King George's cause.

When they did gallop off, it was with cheers for liberty, and Nick o' the Night, who had yielded to the arguments of sweet smiles to tarry at Azalea, more than half-wished himself among the gallant riders.

Our romance approaches its end.

Helen was overjoyed to find herself once more in the old house, and the sisters I was going to say, again looked love and delight into each other's eyes.

Very soon Dorchester was wrested from the enemy, and the British found themselves confined to Charleston and the neighboring islands. But one event threw a gloom over the country. The brave Colonel Hayne—one of the characters of our story—was captured by the enemy, taken to Charleston, and basely executed. He was one of the noblest patriots of the South, and died like a hero—a martyr to the cause of American freedom.

By and by the last cloud of darkness passed from liberty's sky. A cry of rejoicing sounded throughout the land, for Cornwallis was taken, and the freedom of America secured.

Then Nick o' the Night sheathed his sword, and put the spurs aside; then Santee rested in the stables at Azalea, and Whig, his canine friend, slept in the shadow of the palmettoes. Then there was a double wedding at the old mansion, Marion giving one bride away, and Sumter the other.

Essex Wingdon returned to England with Lord Rawdon before the conclusion of the war, and no one regretted his departure.

Captain Clayton purchased the Wingdon estate, and long after the war a solitary man of diminutive stature and a bronzed face often visited between Azalea and the Hall.

It was Francis Marion, who dismissed his band when liberty no longer needed the service of their swords!

THE END.

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